



To Rev. Dr. Gordon J. Murray

From M<sup>r</sup>. M<sup>r</sup>. Colin J. Stewart

Date 11<sup>th</sup> July 1936

THE SCOTTISH RULING ELDER



# THE SCOTTISH RULING ELDER

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LONDON

JAMES CLARKE & CO., LIMITED

9 ESSEX STREET, STRAND, W.C. 2

*Printed in Great Britain*

## PREFACE

I HAVE attempted this book because I am satisfied that there is room for something of the sort. The excellent little volumes of King, Lorimer and McKerrow have served their purpose and are now definitely out of date, written as they were in times which had not our ideas of the Bible or of Divine Right. Our circumstances are different, and the subject now seems to call for fresh treatment. Neither can Dr. G. F. Barbour in his interesting and timely brochure find space for much historical matter. And in those special departments where the ground has been traversed by able researchers such as Edgar and H. G. Graham it has been possible I think to avoid repetition and to supplement their information.

The now happily re-united Church of Scotland claims to have over 30,000 elders. These ought to have some acquaintance with the history of their office generally. The several branches of the Church are still hampered by want of knowledge of the traditions of the other branches and a sketch of these may promote more complete unity. Ministers also might perhaps like to have the facts collected and arranged for them with regard to an office with which they have constant dealings and of which they naturally wish to make the fullest use. Beyond our boundaries there continues to be a great deal



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of misunderstanding of Scottish beliefs and practices and a short statement like that which is now offered may contribute to improve the situation in this regard. Even members of Reformed Churches abroad might find it useful to know some details of the way in which such an important institution has worked in what has long been recognised as the leading Presbyterian country. There are, besides, some yet unsettled problems with regard to the Eldership which now appear to deserve at least restatement in the hope that solution may be brought nearer and perhaps at length uniformity achieved.

While this book is not specially intended for scholars, I hope it will not be useless to them. I have avoided detailed references, but have tried to authenticate all statements and to leave them verifiable. It is extremely difficult to make a historical survey both accurate and interesting, and there is danger of falling between the two. I can only hope that readers will find my effort not too unsuccessful in either respect.

In the case of most districts in Scotland information has been published, including extracts from Session records and details of local history and customs. The present study has naturally been to some extent dependent upon such works and some of them have proved extremely helpful. But where practicable I have preferred to illustrate statements rather from hitherto unpublished sources in the manuscript records of congregations. In this connection I desire to thank very heartily the ecclesiastical authorities, ministers, kirk-sessions and others for access to the Session minutes of the

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following churches : Aberdeen Associate (now Melville), Anstruther Easter, Ceres, Dalmellington, Daviot, Glenlyon Free, Inverary, Kilrenny, Mortlach, Newmachar, Oldhamstocks, Oldmachar, Oxnam, Raasay Free, Savoch, Savoch Associate, Urquhart Free, Yester.

It would be a favour if those who observe any mis-statements, misinterpretations, or similar defects in this volume would communicate with me so that an early opportunity might be taken of making corrections.

G. D. HENDERSON.

*Aberdeen, 1935.*



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# I

## ORIGINS

THE Eldership is perhaps the most distinctive feature of those Churches of the Reformation which honour the Calvinistic tradition.

In this volume we are concerned with the institution as it appeared and developed in Scotland; but it is important to have in mind that it did not originate there, that the Reformation in Europe was a single movement, that the various National Churches which then emerged were long in close communion with one another and of influence with one another, and that the office of the Elder in a form very similar to what we know in this country established itself and is still honoured in many other lands.

Differences exist. It was long before social conditions in Hungary made it practicable to have such an organisation as a Kirk Session, and the Protestant Churches of modern France have found it necessary to accept very drastic alterations in the constitution of a court which they did so much to originate. But in general the similarity of belief and practice is most marked, and the office of Elder unites in proud brotherhood a great body of consecrated Christian workers in the many Reformed Churches of the Continent, in England, Ireland and

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Wales, in the United States, in the British Colonies, and in Scotland.

No doubt the Scottish Elder of the twentieth century is a different figure from his counterpart in the sixteenth. An institution retains its original name more carefully than its original activities. When one looks at externals it is a little difficult to see much continuity in Kingship or Parliament or the British Navy. Yet there is continuity of general function. The form or idea is the same, though the matter and expression may be changed.

Thus the Elder still "rules," though the word may be somewhat differently interpreted, because of great changes which have occurred in the course of the development of our civilisation, changes to which, no doubt, the office has itself nobly contributed.

A historical study ought to be practical ; and the intention here is to examine the past of this interesting institution, the Eldership, in order to understand how it came to be what we find it in the present, with a view to realising what service it is capable of rendering to the future and how it may best be strengthened, guided and used.

The Eldership represents one of the most important and far-reaching impulses of the Reformation. In the Consistory at Geneva John Calvin deliberately gave the people a real share in the government of the Church, as by his encouragement of Congregational Psalm-singing he gave the people a conscious part to play in the public worship of the sanctuary. This was an expression of that principle of the priesthood of all believers which, though not prominent in Calvin's writings, was so



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fundamental in the Reformation, and was indeed better applied by the Reformed Churches than by Luther.

There was no reason in the nature of things why reform should have split the Church into two great sections in the middle of the sixteenth century, but roughly speaking northern Europe had begun to move faster than the southern part of the Continent in the path of what we call progress, and the drift gradually tore the two apart. The Italian Renaissance, although the result of the same spiritual-intellectual-moral-social-material "depression" as produced the corresponding movement in Germany and Holland, brought revived interest in the classical tradition, but did not cause anything resembling that outburst of independence which was the background of the religious reformation in the north. One must not overlook the fact of such minds and souls as those of Valdez, Vittoria Colonna, Paleario, nor will the north forget its debt to Ochino and Peter Martyr. Yet the different extent to which the north and south were affected remains of note. The conditions were different.

Movements are queer things. They are generally their own cause and their own effect, however absurd such a way of putting it may sound. It is, for example, as impossible to decide whether the Scottish education system is a product of the Scottish character, or the Scottish character a product of the Scottish education system, as it is to decide whether the hen or the egg came first. Columbus would not have sailed to America had there been no need for new commercial outlets.

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The demand produced the supply. The supply encouraged the demand. It is the same in modern science. Discovery and need are very curiously linked. And so in History are the Times and the Man. Thus in the countries of the Reformation one had a condition which was becoming impatient with itself, and which responded to certain stimuli which the times themselves made possible.

Some of the important features of the situation must be noted. The old sharp distinction between clergy and laity had lost much of its significance. In the Middle Ages one had to be one thing or the other—quite definitely either of the party of the landed people, fighting or farming, or of the party of the clerics, educated and secluded from the rough and tumble world. The two types of function could only be adequately performed if kept in two completely separate compartments. If one were not strong enough in body or mind to become a satisfactory robber baron, or if one had a leaning to contemplation or sainthood, or if one had failed in the marriage market, then the Church offered its opportunities. And, *vice versa*, if one had not the spiritual or intellectual qualities which made for ecclesiastical success, then one could take to horse and sword. Things became a little mixed through the acquisitive tendencies of churchmen ; but a remarkable cleavage in society is one of the outstanding features of Pre-Reformation times.

Things, however, changed. The baron with his castle and his land lost his supremacy and the merchant and craftsman with their money came forward. The Town moved ahead of the Country. Political theory had to take a new direction.



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Initiative increased, enterprise was encouraged, relations with one place and another developed, the new printing catered for the new curiosity, even gunpowder put all men on a new equality, and altogether the ordinary individual became more effective and more exacting.

The sharp division between clergy and laity was now no longer a necessity of social existence. A new class had appeared which had some education and did not want to fight but which was not at all ecclesiastical. It became evident that one could be in the world though not of it, and that one could be "religious" without being tonsured. The middle wall of partition was breaking down. The layman was coming to his own in the Church.

And so we have the Reformation emphasis upon Justification by Faith, religion becoming individual and personal and inward, and not a mere matter of outward sacrifices and ceremonials and processions and payments. The individual found he could and dared come directly to God without priest, confessional, rites, saints or images, and he discovered that he had high responsibilities in matters of character and of conduct. Thus we have the priesthood of all believers—a doctrine forced upon men by their new experience viewed in the light of Revelation.

The old separation between clergy and laity, so marked by the division between Canon and Civil Law, and symbolised by the refusal of the Cup to the people, disappeared. The Liberty of the Christian Man was established, and the cleric was distinguished from his brother only by his function, by the particular nature of the service he was

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able to render in the Church. All honourable employments, trade, industry, family life, were recognised as vocations, and in them one served God. Reason claimed a new place in the religious experience, as it was bound to do with the assertion of the individual ; and laymen set out to read in and beyond the Bible, to think for themselves, and to decide what the Church was for.

It would seem as if in certain quarters—notably under Lutheranism and Anglicanism—this reformation spirit was more hesitating than elsewhere, and we have rather a modified Romanism than anything that could be called a Revolution. Even under Calvinism men did not always fully appreciate the principles by which they lived ; but the great doctrine of the priesthood of all believers came out noticeably in connection with men's responsibilities in the world, and we have the characteristic stress upon Discipline.

There is no suggestion that the attention of the Church was now being drawn to Discipline for the first time. The very word Consistory, which Calvin applied to his Kirk Session at Geneva, is itself sufficient evidence to the contrary. The practice in the old Church had included a consistorial court in every diocese, under an Official, a man well skilled by legal education. Geneva, which had been very much under Episcopal rule, would be well accustomed to discipline of this sort ; and in Scotland such cases, as, for example, those recorded by Bishop Dowden in his *Mediæval Church in Scotland*, show a situation similar to what we meet in later Kirk Session records.

Discipline of the morals of its members had



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from the earliest days been regarded as within the function of the Church. The thorough study of this subject by Watkins in his *History of Penance* makes further remark unnecessary. Within the pages of Scripture itself the Church could find abundant warrant for its later forms of Discipline.

And it is a complete mistake which leads some to denounce Calvin or Knox as having introduced a new tyranny when they interfered with petty details of conduct. If after the Reformation strictness was sometimes exaggerated, this was but a natural reaction from the gross slackness which had gone before. But the principle was unchanged. In St. Andrews the first Kirk Session took over in the most natural manner without question just the kind of work that had been in the hands of the Consistorial Court. But rule by clergy was at an end. The interesting thing from our present point of view is the place thus given by the Reformers to laymen in connection with the important work of Discipline.

There was, of course, the possibility of such matters being taken over by the magistrates. This happened under Luther, who was peculiarly unsuccessful in dealing with the question of Discipline. It seemed also to Zwingli that this was the obvious course. And this too was what threatened Calvin at Geneva and occasioned one of his very gravest difficulties there. The city had shaken off ecclesiastical tyranny, and the magistrates having taken over the Bishop's authority were not very willing to share it with others. Lightfoot at the Westminster Assembly was very confident that "rulers" meant magistrates. Even

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in Scotland later when (as was often bound to happen) the same persons were at once magistrates and elders, they at times seem to have overlooked the distinction.

Although Civil Law had always been recognised alongside of Canon Law, there was little inclination on the part of the Reformers to allow Law to become entirely secularised. Luther, indeed, on one occasion wanted to burn the documents of the Canon Law ; but elsewhere the Scripture kept up the view that the Church as such had divinely appointed disciplinary authority.

And what has been said applies not only to Discipline in the strict sense, but to spiritual supervision generally, including, both in the view of the old Church and in that of the Reformers, all such matters as Education and the well-being of the poor and the sick.

Lambert, who devised a scheme for the Reformed Church of Hesse in 1526, was a strong supporter of the principle of the priesthood of all believers, but at this date we find still no suggestion as to elders and the entry of laymen into the sphere of Discipline as representatives of the Church. Other interesting Lutheran proposals were similarly limited. After the Reformation was accepted by the local authorities at Basel in 1530, three discipline officers were appointed for each parish, two from among the magistrates and one from the people. Then at Strassburg, under the influence first of Jacob Sturm and afterwards of Martin Bucer, certain lay officials similarly appointed came latterly to have powers of discipline and spiritual authority assigned to them, and in 1534 we find Bucer



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identifying these with the Elders of the New Testament, deriving therefrom divine authority. At first these persons really represented the civil magistrates, but later they were regarded as acting in the name of the Lord with the right and power of binding and loosing in a spiritual capacity. Under the influence of these ideas, Capito devised for Frankfurt in 1535 a Church constitution which was to have included such Elders. In 1536, in writing on the *Epistle to the Romans*, Bucer definitely mentions the four offices of minister of the Word, elders, deacons and doctors, and in 1538, in a treatise upon "true cure of souls and the proper pastoral office," he makes use of certain Scriptural passages, which have ever since remained in use as Scripture proofs for the Eldership as a "spiritual office."

The demand for Elders sprang from the necessities of discipline, and Scripture foundation was then discovered for the office. It was otherwise with the Deacon, for Bucer found it in Scripture before there was any demand for an equivalent office at Strassburg. Presbyter in the New Testament Bucer regarded as a term covering both ministers and elders. At Strassburg his ideas regarding these offices failed to find their way into practice, but in 1539 he had an opportunity of framing a constitution for the Church of Hesse, and in this we have elders appearing along with the ministers and associated with them in complete disciplinary authority. The Hessian scheme won the approval of Luther himself, who declared: "If you shall be able to establish it, you will have achieved a good work."



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It was in 1536 that Calvin, in exile from his native France, arrived at Geneva and was obliged by the eloquence of Farel to settle there. The Reformation was already an accomplished fact in the city ; but the constructive work remained to be done, and the clear-headed legal-minded Calvin was the man to do it.

Discipline was one of the matters to which attention inevitably turned. The memorandum of the Geneva ministers in January, 1537, shows that they believed it to be of supreme importance. They held that it had been so regarded in the Apostolic Age, referring to St. Matthew xviii, 1 Timothy i, and 1 Corinthians v ; and they asked that the civic authorities should set apart persons of character and repute to supervise the life and conduct of the various districts of the city. There was here as yet no suggestion of purely Church officials, and the word Elder was not used, nor did the Scripture passages quoted include any reference to such an office. Discipline leading to excommunication was stated to have been assigned by Christ to the Church, but at the moment the reference was to control of it by the ministers for the Christian community, and to magisterial assistance. The relation of discipline to admission to the Lord's Supper was from the first definitely in the mind of Calvin. In the editions of the *Institutio* before 1543, the fully developed Calvinistic demand is wanting. But that the Reformer would not be satisfied permanently with merely state officials along with the ministers is already evident from what he wrote in the first draft of the *Institutio* (1536), where he clearly distinguishes the spiritual

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and the political power and recognises (as his experience warranted) that obedience to God might involve disobedience to the magistrates. Meantime he had to be content with less. His own scheme was not fully matured ; and there were many who in extreme revolt against former clerical domination would have kept him and his fellow ministers out of this sort of thing altogether.

Presently these supporters of hard-won liberty were victorious and Calvin was banished from the city in April, 1538. In the autumn he settled at Strassburg, and here he made his headquarters and home and principal seat of activities until in the latter part of 1541 he finally accepted the pressing recall to Geneva. This stay of Calvin in Strassburg is definitive in the history of the Eldership.

During those years Calvin saw much of Bucer and the influence of Bucer was strong. It was strong in matters of Doctrine, and long afterwards Calvin could write very sincerely, "Chiefly I have wished to follow Bucer, man of holy memory." But we have noted the particular interest which Bucer at this very period was taking in the matter of Discipline ; and this subject, being of such special concern to both, must have been thoroughly discussed between them.

The consequence was that when Calvin, returning in triumph to Geneva, was asked to guide the city in ecclesiastical polity, the *Ordonnances* which he helped to frame and which were adopted in November, 1541, contained a fully developed scheme for a Consistory. The details had to be worked out in a Committee, which included civic



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representatives, and Calvin at no stage in his career was able to have entirely his own way even in this matter upon which he felt so strongly. The important points which derive from the discussions with Bucer are the view that this proposed polity of the Church was Biblical, and the view that this entailed four offices, namely those of Pastor, Doctor, Elder and Deacon. This scheme was satisfactory to Calvin, and seemed now to have been what he had been seeking when he first fell foul of the civic authorities before his banishment. The doctrine of the Sovereignty of God was asserting itself here as central in Calvinism.

The best type of revolutionary is one who appreciates the past. Calvin was of this class. Well acquainted with classical literature, and owing a good deal to Cicero, his familiarity with the Fathers was such as surprised his antagonists, and he drew largely upon Augustine for that view of God's eternal purpose which gave him both his Theology and his ideas of Church and State. Besides this he belonged to the most conservative of professions, being a lawyer and the son of a lawyer.

It is far from strange, therefore, to find Calvin more than Luther, and more than most of his contemporaries, with his eye upon what might be regarded as the Institutions of the Apostolic Church as displayed in the New Testament. When convinced of the teaching of Scripture it was easy for him to find confirmation of his views in the works of the Fathers and in the records of the early Church. An interesting example is the way in which he claims the support of Ambrose for his views of the Eldership.

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The general re-discovery of the Bible through Erasmus and Reuchlin and Luther and the printing press had very naturally led to an extreme devotion to it, so that it completely ousted the Church itself as the ultimate authority for the Reformers. All the more because the particular abuses which drove them into antagonism were quite clearly absent in the days which the Bible narrative brought once more to notice. The restoration of primitive Christianity was thus an obvious ideal.

It was exposition of Scripture that formed the basis of the new preaching which characterised the Reformation. Colet's Lectures on Romans and 1 Corinthians drew all the live minds in Oxford. Luther had known his Bible well before his conversion ; but he had always interpreted it under the guidance of scholastic authority, and now found that it had to be re-interpreted under the leading of the Spirit of God. One of Zwingli's first moves at Zurich had been to expound Scripture in its own light. It was as an expositor that Calvin began his epoch-making activities in Geneva.

Naturally it took some time for Protestant theory as to the Bible to systematise itself. By the 17th century it had developed into a singularly rigid affair ; and only in our own days have the limitations of this outlook been at last successfully overcome, and the Bible put in its true setting and assigned its true significance. But for Calvin the authority of the Scriptures was such that they were regarded as the very Word of God, "believed to have come from Heaven as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them," "bearing upon their face as clear evidence of their truth as



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white and black do of their colour," having "a divine majesty" about them which "force us to do them homage," bearing witness of their divinity in themselves, their miracles, their prophecies, their harmony, their dignity and simplicity, their antiquity, their originality, their efficacy to "burn into the conscience as with a hot iron," their sufficiency as revealed in the lives and deaths of saints and martyrs, but only finally authenticated to those who have faith by the "secret testimony of the Spirit." Calvin himself speaks with a prophet's voice in those glowing chapters of the final version of the *Institutio* where he outlines his doctrine of the Word; and it was inevitable that one so enraptured by this Revelation should plan his Reformation of the Church after what he believed to be plain Scriptural commandment. He reminds us how "Paul testifies that the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets;" and he himself set out to restore this work of the Apostles and Prophets.

Here, however, we touch the difficulty of interpretation. The early Reformers were unconscious of many of the possible pitfalls in this path which modern Scholarship has revealed. Many curious survivals from Scholasticism and the Fathers certainly worried Erasmus and Colet, but Luther and Calvin were on less anxious ground. Luther said: "Not only is the Word of God so proclaimed in the Word of the Gospel, but the Holy Ghost also writes it inwardly in the heart." Calvin, as we have noted, laid stress upon "the secret testimony of the Spirit." Some of the dangers of Subjectivism were revealed by the appearance of the Sects; but



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even those who most scrupulously avoided the cruder errors of interpretation and relied most simply and sincerely upon the guidance of the Spirit, could not but read with their own eyes, the eyes of their own experience, and this is where Calvin's theory of the Eldership is affected.

The New Testament statements regarding offices in the Church were a little troublesome, because apparently not consistent. This does not worry us now, for we know that customs for a long time differed in different places in early Christendom ; that some of the Scriptural utterances are general, and were not meant to be either technical or complete ; that in fact the accounts given while most interesting historically are certainly not of the nature of commandments. To Calvin, however, with his very different view of the Bible, they offered consistent, complete and authoritative instruction. He was not aware how much his own judgment and experience guided his selection and valuation of Scriptural statements ; and he entirely believed that he was taking the straightforward, simple and only authentic meaning of what he found in the Bible when in the *Ordonnances* he boldly and baldly asserted : " There are four orders of offices which our Saviour has instituted for the government of the Church, first pastors, next doctors, then elders and fourthly deacons."

Calvin knew that scriptural warrant had been offered for all the minor clerical offices of the mediæval Church, for in the first draft of the *Institutio* (1536), in the discussion of Orders, he goes into this. He judged the evidence, however, to be simply ludicrous.

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We are aware, besides, that regarding offices other inductions than those of Calvin have been made from the letter of Scripture. The Anglican finds Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons, but can see no trace of Elders.

In investigating the instructions of Scripture with regard to ecclesiastical polity, Calvin first of all set aside Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists as extraordinary officers suited by their very nature only to the primitive period of miracle. The ordinary offices which he believed our Lord desired to persist in the organised Church were then inferred from certain passages of Scripture. These were Ephesians iv. 11, where in the same verse with Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists we find mention of "pastors and teachers," these two being apparently classed together : Romans xii. 7 and 8, where after a mention of prophecy we have ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy, in which case the first three were judged to be related to doctrine, the fifth to discipline, the fourth and sixth to distribution, so as to correspond to pastors (with teachers), elders and deacons : 1 Corinthians xii. 28, where we have apostles and prophets, and then teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues, while the succeeding verses specify apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, speaking with tongues, and interpreting. With reference to these offices Calvin wrote in his later version of the *Institutio* : "As to those which were temporary I say nothing . . . but there are two of perpetual duration, viz., government and care of the poor."

On Scriptural grounds Calvin identified bishops,



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pastors and presbyters. On Scriptural grounds he also recommended deacons : "such deacons as the Apostolic Church had, it becomes us to have after her example." The Doctor or Teacher was for convenience separated from the Ministry of the Word. But where do Elders come in ?

The word used in Scripture is Presbyter, but this on the Presbyterian interpretation obviously refers in many places to those otherwise designated bishops and pastors. And later in Scotland confusion is at times caused by the use of the expression "eldership" to refer to the Exercise or Presbytery of ministers and elders and not to the particular Kirk Session.

The fact was that something like Elders was required for discipline. There was present to all minds the frequent mention of Elders in the Old Testament, and especially those chosen to share the burden of Moses. There was also the memory of the Elders of the Synagogue. Further, some impression was made by the fact of Jesus having His group of twelve Apostles associated with Him throughout the Gospel narrative. And there may even have been reminiscences of the mediæval practice of following the opinions of the "Elders" or better part in a monastery rather than the majority.

It strikes one now as a little forced, and it seems evident that in different circumstances the Presbyters in the sense of ministers would have been left to attend to the ruling as well as to the preaching and the sacraments. But an attractive interpretation of Scripture sprang to the mind and brought conviction with it. For Calvin 1 Timothy v. 17



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was a very important verse in this connection : " Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the Word and doctrine." This *does* suggest a division of the work, and that was the point Calvin seized upon. He had no doubt about the interpretation. 1 Corinthians v. 4, which proposes judgment of wrong doing, " when ye are gathered together," was held as indicating what Calvin called " a lawful consistory."

Nothing in any passage cited could, however, be held to signify that any of the offices was to be for laymen as distinct from clerical persons. And Calvin did not go carefully into that. He was satisfied that " governments " in 1 Corinthians xii. 28 and " ruling " in Romans xii. 8 refer to " seniors selected from the people to unite with the bishops in pronouncing censures and exercising discipline, for this is the only meaning which can be given to the passage, ' He that ruleth with diligence.' " This provides elders along with ministers to control discipline, and leaves it undiscussed whether both belonged to a clerical class, or whether one was clerical and the other lay, or whether there were two sets of ordinary men merely distinguished from others and from one another by function.

Calvin was as much against merely clerical rule as were the magistrates of Geneva. But while the only alternative which was clear to the magistrates was that they themselves should rule, a third way seemed possible to Calvin, namely that the Church as represented by ministers and selected members together should control matters of dis-

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cipline. Calvin was strongly opposed to the Romish view that there is a Sacrament of Orders. He was always, besides, more prophet than priest. On Biblical grounds, however, he accepted ordination, including the laying on of hands by ministers. He also thought this setting apart useful as a reminder to the ordinand that he is no longer his own. Nor did he regard it as an "empty sign," for "the Spirit of God has not instituted anything in the Church in vain." He drew no distinction between ordination to one office and ordination to another, for no such distinction appears in Scripture, and in the *Ordonnances* ordination is only discussed in connection with ministers. But the elders Calvin obtained were not what he wanted. He had to be content with persons who were more representative of the civic authority than of the congregation. In 1541 the elders were expected simply to take an oath offered them by the Council, and not till the 1560 version of the *Ordonnances* do we find elders presented to the Church for its acceptance, the names duly published and objections invited. Calvin would have liked elders who were more exclusively church officers, and he made demands of a spiritual nature of elders. No doubt as things developed under Calvinism ministers have become more "clerical" than he expected and elders more "lay," but the problem was not thought out by him, and the sharp distinction between the "Presbyter" and "Lay" theories of the eldership was a subsequent appearance. What interested Calvin specially was that excommunication should be recognised as a function of the Church and not of the State, and he gradually



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clarified his statement of his views in this direction. Thus the 1556 version of his *Commentary on Romans* has a special addition to make the position unmistakable. His main concern was to have a body of men distinct from the magistrates, charged with spiritual control of discipline and in the position of having the last word with regard to excommunication and to admission to communion as representing the Church.

The influence of Calvin and the Church of Geneva have been amazing. Directly or indirectly his teaching with regard to the eldership is followed. The Scripture foundation, the four ecclesiastical offices, the ideal of spiritual independence, the granting of responsibility to others than ministers, consistorial control of moral discipline, education and the poor, even details with regard to General Sessions, and the division of parishes into elders' districts, the particular duties of elders, the special points to which discipline should be directed, the weekly meeting for this purpose, the share of the elders in the Communion service—all this was simply taken over in Scotland. There was additional wisdom derived from French experience and some modifications were obviously demanded by local circumstances, but to all intents and purposes the Eldership as known to Reformed Scotland is that of Calvin.

The Eldership had been more or less accepted in Scotland before Knox arrived in 1559 to take the lead in establishing the Reformation, and we find no discussion whatever of the matter. Presbyterianism in a somewhat elementary form seems from an early stage to have been taken for granted.

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Scotland had not been living in isolation from the Reformation movement on the Continent. Lutheran and Zwinglian ideas had filtered in through George Wishart, and no doubt merchants and others who had been in Germany and Switzerland had reported the position which laymen were receiving at Strassburg, in Hesse and at Zurich. The Anabaptist use of the name "elder" must also have been known to all who were interested in ecclesiastical developments. Some acquaintance may also be assumed with the well-developed practice of the continental exiles in London under John à Lasco. And all the world knew what Calvin had wrought at Geneva.

George Wishart, however, had not proposed the office of elder. When he celebrated Communion it was to a small group and he administered the elements himself, and there was in his day no opportunity for any new consistorial body seeking to control discipline and no obvious way to interfere with the existing machinery for the care of the poor. Anabaptism at no time made any favourable impression in Scotland. John à Lasco may have had some influence. With Geneva itself there must have been contact or the Scottish Lords would scarcely have been so ready to welcome Knox in 1555 and to think of him later as the man for them when he had been so long south of Scotland.

But it was with France that the most intimate and continuous intercourse existed, and there the eldership had been adopted from Geneva some time before the first assembly of 1559. The Genevan rejection of the hierarchy had been eagerly welcomed. It also happened that it was more than



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easy for France to achieve one thing which Calvin despaired of accomplishing at Geneva. The French Church was never in danger of being run by the State. The eldership could actually be a purely Church office, spiritual, distinct from magistracy. Geneva, via France, had made the Scottish reformers Presbyterians before the *First Book of Discipline* was promulgated, though we cannot go so far as to say that there was such deliberate imitation of the practice of those continental Churches that departure from their ways was ever thought sacrilegious. The system was accepted on its merits and independently held and unhesitatingly modified to suit Scottish requirements. Uniformity, confessional or governmental or liturgical was never a fetish with the Reformers. The unity they had in mind was common conformity with Scripture.

John Knox cannot be claimed as ranking high in the matter of originality. He may not be classed with Luther and Calvin ; and probably in 1560 Europe did not require another Luther or Calvin. But Knox did not uncritically accept whatever greater men than he approved. His acquaintance with Protestant custom and belief was remarkably wide, for he had been strongly under Wishart's influence and therefore conscious both of Wittenberg and of Zurich. He had been in England during a formative period of its Reformation. He had been obliged to go fully into controversial matters at Frankfurt, incidentally becoming familiar with the teaching of Pullain. His writings show knowledge of à Lasco's work. He had specially made a tour of the various Swiss Churches. He had lived for more than one period at Dieppe and

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assisted the Protestant cause there. And in spite of all this and in the light of it his ultimate classification is that of a disciple of John Calvin.

When he left England, it was to Geneva and not to Germany that he gravitated. The call to Frankfurt he accepted "at the commandment of that notable servant of God, John Calvyne." It was to Calvin that Knox's Frankfurt congregation turned for guidance on the question which presently divided them. When asked in 1557 to return to Scotland he consulted Calvin, and the Lords in Scotland wrote to Calvin, "that by his authoritie he wold command the said John anes agane to visit thame." In 1559 John Knox mentions letters written from the Scottish reformers to "that excellent servant of God, John Calvine," and again in 1564 there is talk of consulting Calvin. Elsewhere Knox speaks of Calvin as "that singular instrument of God," and his whole attitude is well summed up in his account of Geneva as "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles." While Knox lived and worked at Geneva he must have been in close communion with Calvin; and both the *Scots Confession* and the *First Book of Discipline* echo Calvin in a way and to a degree that is unmistakable and notable.

But Calvin's views and practices only proved acceptable to Knox and were eagerly encouraged by him in Scotland because like Calvin he believed these to be strictly Biblical. This is worth dwelling upon. Row, in his account of the Reformation, insists that the Church of Scotland "took not their pattern from any Kirk in the world, no, not fra



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Geneva itself, but laying God's word before them, made Reformation according thereunto." Certainly this was the intention, and Scotland for long clung to the belief that its Church constitution was dictated to it by the Bible.

It was to the Bible Knox turned for all his inspiration and guidance. A survey of his voluminous writings shows his personal close familiarity with the letter of Scripture, and we know that in middle life his zeal for the Word made him turn to the study of the original tongues in which it was expressed. Whatever he wrote is full of Scripture—even, for example, his *Letter to the Queen Regent*. With him the purpose of the Reformation was to return to beliefs and practices prescribed in the Bible and characteristic of the primitive Church. "Faythe," he says, "looketh ever to the will of God revealed by the Word, so that Faith hath both her beginning and continuance by the Word of God." He speaks of Scripture as the food of the soul, just as necessary to the spiritual life as meat and drink and the light of the sun are to the bodily life. And the Confession of his Geneva congregation states: "The worde of God conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament which, as it is above the autoritie of the same Church, and onely sufficient to instruct us in all thinges concernynge salvation, so is it left for all degrees of men to reade and understand. For without this Worde, neither Church, Concile or decree can establishe any point touching salvation." In the *Godley Letter to the Faithful in London*, which he wrote in 1554, he says: "I never labourit to persuade any man in matteris of religioun (God I tak to recorde in

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my conscience) except by the verie simplicitie and playne infallible trewth of God's word." In his *Admonition to the Professors of Godis Truth in England*, written about that same time, there is a particularly eloquent passage : "Ye, knowynge the Worde of God not onely to be that whereby were created heaven and earth, but also to be the power of God to salvation to al that beleve, the bryght lantarne to the fete of these that by nature walke in darkenesse, the lyfe to those that by synne are dead, a comforte of suche as be in tribulation, the tower of defence to suche as be moste feble, the wysdome and great felicitie of suche as delytheth in the same, and to be shorte, ye knowe Goddes worde to be of suche efficacie and strength that therby is synne purged, death vanquyshed, tyrantes suppressed, and finally the Devel, the author of all myserie, overthrowen and confounded."

The view he adopted stands out clearly in the *Scots Confession* of 1560, which asserts : "As we beleve and confesse the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and maik the man of God perfect, so do we affirme and avow the authoritie of the same to be of God and neather to depend on men nor angellis." All Reformation, he insists, must be made "according to Goddis worde," and all practices of the Church of Rome must be "laid to the squair-rule of Goddis worde," which is "the tuichstone to try the ryght from the wrong." Anything which Romanists put forward he is ready to accept "yf thei by Goddis Scriptures could confute us or by the same Word establissh thair assertiones." Roman customs are condemned in the *First Book of Discipline*, "becaus in Goddis



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scripturis thai naither have commandment nor assurance." Prayers for the dead he refused as repugnant to Scripture teaching. He points out to Mary Queen of Scots that "no such thing as thair masse is maid mentione of within the whole Scripturis," and he was insistent that "the masse, purgatorie, praying to saintes, erecting of images and such other have no assurance of God's worde, but are the meare dreames, statutes and inventions of men."

In this spirit everything in Doctrine, Worship and Government was discussed and arranged. Reformation of anything that could be shown to be unscriptural was promised with regard to the *Scots Confession*, the form and order of the services as in his Church at Geneva was to be "lymited within the compasse of God's worde," and in Church government the purpose was "that the reverent face of the primitive and apostolick Churche should be reduced agane to the eyes and knowledge of men." His policy, as he himself declared to Queen Elizabeth, was that "whatsoever He approveth by his Eternal Word that shalbe approved, and whatsoever he dampneth, shalbe condemned, thogh all men on earth soold hazard the justification of the sam." And Scotland entirely approved.

Knox's own account of the introduction of the eldership into Scotland takes it back to the days before his arrival. Protestant brethren, he says, had begun to meet for prayer and reading of Scripture, "and this our weak begynnyng God did so bless that within few monethis the hartis of many war so strenthned, that we sought to have

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the face of a Church amanges us and open crymes to be punished without respect of persone. And for that purpose, by common electioun, war eldaris appointed, to whom the hole brethren promissed obedience : for at that tyme we had na publick ministeris of the worde." The *Ordour of the Electioun of Elderis and Deaconis in the privie Kirk of Edinburgh* seems to refer to this early period. Sessional activity is also recorded at St. Andrews, and may have existed at Dundee before the official setting up of Protestantism in 1560. The First Scottish General Assembly simply took elders for granted. Knox had no need to inculcate his views on this point, but merely to see them expressed. The *First Book of Discipline* sets a high standard regarding the qualifications for session membership, rules that the appointment be "by common and free election," once a year, the names being publicly read in case of objections to life or doctrine and explains that the Session's duty is "to assist the minister in all publick affares of the Church," including the discipline of ministers, elders and people. The document did not become law, but it doubtless regulated practice.

Andrew Melville, with whose name the completion of the Scottish system of ecclesiastical polity is associated, learned, high-minded, clear-headed, was not, like Knox, a prophet, but rather a man of system and order. He had long experience of conditions in France and Geneva. To him Bishops meant State control, involving repudiation of the essential Calvinistic doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. Scotland under his guidance had naturally no opportunity of devising anything original with



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regard to Episcopacy, as has been done in Presbyterian Hungary. Melville's reorganisation of the Scottish system of Church courts by the introduction of Presbyteries on French lines seemed to provide an adequate substitute, while keeping the Church free from the danger of Erastianism. On the whole no change seemed requisite with regard to the Eldership ; but the *Second Book of Discipline*, which embodies Melville's ideas, is a little clearer than the *First* and mentions, in addition to ordinary care of good order and discipline, the examination of communicants, the visiting of the sick, the execution of Assembly instructions and so on. It is stated that "eldaris anis lawfully callit to the office and having gifts of God meit to exercise the same, may not leive it again," though all need not serve continuously. It is emphasized that the eldership is "a spirituall function as is the ministrie," and apparently Melville adumbrated a public official giving much time to spiritual work and deserving to be paid like a teacher, though carefully distinguished from the minister as to preaching and the celebration of the sacraments.

And so rapidly and completely did the office of the elder justify itself in the practical religious life of Protestant Scotland, that, though the elder of the *Second Book of Discipline* perhaps never actually materialised, there has been no period since the Reformation, whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, when the national Church has found cause to question its importance.

## II

### THE ELDER AT COMMUNION

THE man in the street nowadays who thinks at all of elders probably associates them in his mind chiefly with Communion services. To him elders are persons who have distinctive responsibilities in connection with the dispensing of the elements on Sacrament Sunday. In these days when Session "discipline" is to all intents and purposes non-existent, and when deacons' courts and committees of management have in the majority of congregations control of finance, and when the State superintends education and administers the Poor Law, the Communion "occasion" when elders figure so prominently is the one thing left that seems clearly their special province.

It is of course perfectly true that since early Reformation days elders have had much to do with Communion services, and this we must presently discuss at length. But there has been some misunderstanding involved, and in certain quarters even within the Church elders have in modern times been given a place not anticipated by the Reformers. Sometimes the Communion is managed as a piece of Kirk Session business, the whole service being included in the time between the constituting and the closing of the Kirk Session.



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This was specially characteristic of United Presbyterian Churches, but was not unknown in the Church of Scotland in the second half of the nineteenth century. It seems to be implied in the statement of the United Free Church *Practice and Procedure* that a quorum of the Kirk Session must be present at Communion, a statement not expressly contained in the corresponding volumes of the U.P. Church and the Free Church, and now again omitted in the latest *Practice and Procedure* (1934) of the united Church. *The Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Canada* (1922) explicitly lays it down that the Session shall be constituted in the vestry before the service.

One finds nothing of this sort in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries ; and it is contrary to the teaching and practice of the Church of Scotland. Mair's *Digest* (1887) basing itself upon an Act of the General Assembly of 1878, which seems merely to record the established rule, says : " The administration is not by the Kirk Session but by the minister. Elders officiate at the administration as individuals co-operating with him. To constitute a meeting of Session before the day of Communion or on the morning of it and imagine it sitting till all the relative services are over is indefensible."

An allied modern innovation is for elders to serve the Minister at Communion. Reformed practice was for the minister to partake first, and then give the elements to the people in the capacity of a representative of the Master. Revolt from the priestly view of the ministry has suggested that the minister should in no way be distinguished from the other communicants, while a high view

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of the spiritual function of the elder really attempts to put him in the place of a priest in distributing, though it should be noted in this connection that in the ancient Church the rule was for the Deacon who helped to dispense, to do so "not as a priest, but as one that ministers to the priest."

It is obvious that several tendencies have been at work. The Secession movements classed elders and ministers more definitely together, and sometimes the effect is to make them all practically priests and sometimes to make them all merely laymen. Elsewhere there has been a tendency to exalt the minister at the expense of the eldership, and this has taken advantage of the surprising fact that in no fundamental document of any of the Reformed Churches is participation in the distribution of the elements included amongst the functions of elders. *First and Second Books of Discipline*, *Knox's Liturgy*, the *Westminster Directory* and *Form of Church Government* make no mention of elders at Communion. Neither do such unofficial statements as those of Alexander Henderson, George Gillespie, and James Guthrie in the seventeenth century, while from early nineteenth century writers such as Lorimer and Hill one could never guess that elders in any way participated. The *Euchologion* in its various editions in the order for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper states that "the minister and *assistants* bring in the elements," thus carefully avoiding the word elder in this connection. Its successor, *Prayers for Divine Service*, does not mention how the elements are brought in. Even the volumes on *Practice and Procedure* of the U.P. Church and of the Free



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Church have no reference to the matter in their account of the elders' function. It was actually not till 1931 that an official utterance was made by the General Assembly of the united Church of Scotland that "the elders assist the minister in the distribution of the elements at the Lord's Supper."

In the early Church the highest spiritual punishment was excommunication. Only those who had not committed or had been absolved from certain sins might be admitted to the Holy Table. At Geneva the whole trouble about excommunication shows how clearly the matter of Discipline associated itself with the Communion in the mind of Calvin. He was most anxious to keep the Sacrament for the Lord's people, not merely for those who were cleansed by Baptism, but for those against whom no gross charge could be alleged by fellow communicants. "I will die," he said, "sooner than this hand shall reach the symbols of the Lord's body to anyone who has been found a despiser of God." This is entirely true to his fundamental principles as to the nature of the Sacrament, rejecting any theory that would make it effective of itself as a piece of magic apart from the faith of the recipients, and regarding it as blasphemy to take part irreverently, and obviously eating and drinking damnation to the soul.

A danger of this line of thought with respect to the Communion is that it is apt to limit it to a small set of self-righteous professors, persons sure not only of their election but of their saintliness, people who believe themselves worthy. This appeared in some of the Scottish Protesters in the Covenanting period, who had more horror of

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“promiscuous” Communion than of schism. This type is apt to drive away from the Lord’s Table not merely the unrepentant but the humble and troubled believer and indeed all for whom the Sacrament was instituted and whom it is calculated to help most savingly. Reverence for the Communion even to-day keeps Highland Communion rolls small, as the majority do not dare to approach the Holy Table. The report of Duirinish (Skye) in the *New Statistical Account* shows how serious the state of affairs may become. There is misunderstanding and superstition here. It goes far back in Scottish history, for it had already to be combated in the days of Queen Margaret. “What!” said the Queen to the clergy. “Shall no one that is a sinner taste that holy mystery? If so, then it follows that no one at all should receive it . . . and why did the Lord make the proclamation in the Gospel, ‘Except you shall eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you’?” Even to-day diffident young people are apt to suggest that they are not good enough to become Communicants, and require to be similarly reminded that it is exactly for such that the Sacrament is most appropriate.

But Calvin himself and those who understood him, did not make any such mistake. They laid stress upon Faith, and turned away no penitent sinner. But as in the mediæval Church confession and absolution were required before Communion, so the Reformers (who retained the mediæval nowhere so much as in connection with the Sacraments) demanded that all should examine and purge themselves, so that they might in no wise come



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to the Lord's Table with their hearts still hardened against the working of the Holy Spirit.

In Scotland, Communion was celebrated on rare occasions. Calvin would have liked it every Sunday. Knox proposed to hold it every month. But in practice once a year was almost universal in Scotland until recently and that even in periods when Episcopacy was dominant. The Episcopal Assembly of 1616 aimed at four celebrations in the towns and two in the country parishes. The Glasgow Assembly of 1638 likewise urged more frequent Communion. But the Assembly of 1712 is still anxious about parishes that do not even have Communion once a year, and the Assembly of 1751 has the very same problem before it. The Episcopalian incumbent at Foveran (Aberdeenshire) in 1696 declared his parishioners unworthy of being admitted to Communion, and his Presbyterian successor did not have a Communion for many years, "not having got the people in suitable fitness."

At Inverary in 1656 it is minuted that the Lord's Supper had not been celebrated for a long time owing to the people's "ignorance and mis-carriages." Dunfermline had Communion only once in a considerable period before 1689. Rothiemay (Banffshire) had no Communion from 1713 till 1721, Cairnie (Aberdeenshire) none from 1719 till 1723. Kingussie in 1731 was reported to have had "no sacrament for a long time." Mill of Dunrossness, Shetland, in his *Diary* records that when he went to the parish in 1743 he found the people so ignorant, accommodation so bad and utensils so difficult to obtain that he did not have the Lord's Supper for six years. At Shapinshay,

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Orkney, for similar reasons no Communion was observed in the fifty years before 1795.

But most parishes did have an annual celebration, often spread over two Sundays, in the seventeenth century and becoming an "occasion" of widespread excitement of about a week's duration during the eighteenth.

It is sometimes overlooked that the main reason for rarity of Communion services in Scotland had to do with the important matter of discipline. It was not so much innate Scottish reverence or pagan superstition as the fact that Ministers and Sessions were expected to catechise and examine every individual on each occasion before he was permitted to communicate. In the parish of Deer (Aberdeenshire) early in the seventeenth century the minister protested that it was physically impossible for this to be done more than once a year in a large country parish. We have to remember the weather—a most important factor in social life when one knows the state of seventeenth and early eighteenth century roads. We have to remember sowings and harvests and similar natural interruptions of ecclesiastical routine.

The catechising had to be genuine and thorough. It was sometimes done in church, those in each elder's district being required to present themselves on stated days, or it took place at specified farms, the cottars and neighbours assembling according to pulpit intimation. The practice of catechising continued until within living memory. At Presbyterian visitations inquiry was made regarding the minister's attention to this duty. Persons were required to know the Creed, the Lord's Prayer



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From the beginning all the preliminaries to Communion were definitely a concern of the Session. In 1574 the St. Andrews Session minutes read : "The seat decernit and ordeined the examination preceding the celebration of the Communion nextocum to begin upon Moninday the vii day of Junii next to cum and Wednesday the secound of Junii next to cum appointed to cheis the examin-atoris and to tak ordour anent the fasting and celebration of the Communion." In 1600 the deacons of the same parish received instructions to make a roll of the people for the Communion examination. The Communion Roll as we know it is a nineteenth century product ; but we sometimes find elders ordered to make a list of those in their district entitled to Communion, or at least to watch that none not so entitled venture to approach the tables. And the making up of the roll is sometimes recorded as at Yester (East Lothian) in 1769, where "the Session met at the manse for prayer and to read over the examine roll as usual before the Sacrament." At Torryburn (Fife) in 1641 we read : "Ordains examinations for the first diet (July) to begin on every Tuesday and Thursday of the month of January and the Session to convene every evening thereafter and examine on the Sabbath afternoons in the month of March and April and May." Alexander Henderson, in his *Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (1641), says : "The elders do attend with the pastor in catechising the people." Dunfermline Presbytery in 1649 gave the order that the elders "come with the people of their division to catechising and examination," and in

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1656 this Presbytery demanded not only the elder of the district but one other elder with the minister at the examination. At Kilmartin (Argyll) in 1699 the elders are to be "circumspect and watchful to be present at the circular examinations in their respective precincts." The rules of admission to Communion at Dunfermline about this time are quoted at length in Lorimer's *Eldership of the Church of Scotland* (1841), pp. 145 f. A modern example may be added, where first communicants are concerned. At Gilcomston *quoad sacra* Church (Aberdeen) in 1836, "the Session having heard forty-four of the young women examined by the Moderator, unanimously agreed to admit them." First Communicants must still be admitted by resolution of Kirk Session, and though no longer questioned by the elders are generally introduced to the Kirk Session before the service at which they make their public profession. A large part of the minutes of the Session of Aberdeen Associate Church (now Melville) are taken up with consideration of requests for admission to membership of the congregation. A Free Church example may also be given. The Kirk Session of Raasay Free Church in 1877 minuted: "Compeared Widow Marion McSween, Dry Harbour, Rona, applying for admission to the Lord's Table. . . . The Session after examination, being satisfied with her knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as her general behaviour so far as known to them, agreed to admit her."

Elders had to review the character and conduct as well as the knowledge of the communicants in their districts, as the Communion season approached.



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At Auchterhouse (Angus) in 1677 we find the record : "The minister intreats because the giving of the Communion approacheth that the elders be carefull in their several quarters to search who are at variance and discord with their neighbours, and aither reconcile them or els delait them to the Session, to the end those who are contumacious and will not be reconciled may be debard from coming to the table of the Lord." The Session at Fossoway (Kinross) in 1616 arranged a special meeting before Communion, when differences between members of the congregation might be made up. Sometimes the elders held "privy censures" of themselves before Communion, as we see from the Dalmellington (Ayrshire) records for 1770.

When minister and elders were at last satisfied regarding the fitness of each member to benefit by Communion, a token or ticket was given in order to admission. These tokens have been a source of great interest to collectors. They are still in use in some parishes, e.g., Oathlaw (Forfarshire), but there is not even a form of catechising, and since about 1840 printed cards have gradually come to be distributed to all upon the Communion Rolls, unless under discipline. The kind of entry which is common in Session minutes with regard to tokens may be gathered from these. Ceres Session in 1703 records : "Tokens distributed to such as applied with suitable admonition to each of the receivers and some few as to whose knowledge there seemed to be any doubt were examined in face of the Session." At Oldhamstocks (East Lothian) in 1701 : "The Session being met

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for prayer and considering who should be admitted to the Lord's Table, after some tyme spent by minister and elders in prayer, the Session did consider who were to be admitted, and appointed tokens to be accordingly distributed by the elders in their several bounds." Urquhart Free Church in 1890 minutes as follows : "The Session proceeded to distribute tokens to the Communicants on the Communion Roll in accordance with the rule usually adopted on such occasions, and thereafter tokens were served to other parties from neighbouring congregations in accordance with the usual order." At Cambuslang (Lanark) in connection with the famous Whitefield revival in 1742, the Kirk Session "taking into consideration the divine command to celebrate the ordinance often," arranged for two Communion services in successive months. For the first they distributed 1,700 tokens, and for the second 3,000, and in the latter case we are told "if there had been access to get tokens, there would have been a thousand more communicants." Dr. Samuel Johnson found the minister of Cawdor very busy with the distribution of tokens when he visited that place on his tour in 1773.

Boston records that his Session at Ettrick in 1727 found that horse-racing was arranged for the Monday before Communion and therefore delayed the distribution of tokens till the Thursday, with the warning that none would be given to those who attended the races. The result was that the race meeting had to be abandoned.

At Yester in 1741 we read : "The minister exhorted the elders to their duty and to take great



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care in distributing tokens to such as design to communicate, that none should be admitted who should appear to be unfit to partake of the holy ordinance, and that such as seemed to deserve a rebuke, either the elders themselves should do it or if they thought the case required a more weighty admonition that they should report the same to the minister."

Elders received the tokens as communicants advanced to the tables. Steuart of Pardovan (*Collections and Observations*), describing events early in the eighteenth century, says: "Each person before communicating doth deliver the parish lead ticket when sought for to one of the elders or deacons when sitting at the table, but it is safer to demand these warrants or tokens at their entry to the tables."

An Alvah elder (Banffshire) in 1657 was deposed for having given a token to a woman who had been debarred by the Session from the table. At Ceres in 1661 a woman was accused of having come into the parish without a testimonial and having Communion without asking or receiving a ticket, and without being examined, delivering to the elder a token belonging to St. Andrews.

It was an offence not to be present at Communion if eligible. At Culross in 1642 a man was accused of absenting himself from Communion and condemned "to stand the next Lord's day at the Kirk door betwixt the 2 and 3 bell bearfooted and bear-headed and thereafter mak his repentance publicklye." Four persons at Elgin in 1648 "made ther publick repentance for absence from the examinatione and communione." This had

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begun just after the Reformation when absence from Communion was held to signify popery. Thus in 1571 we find people delated to the Session who did not attend Communion. In Aberdeenshire in the early seventeenth century there were many papists, and we have frequent cases of persons ordered to attend Communion to prove their Protestantism. At Longley (now St. Fergus) in 1610 it was reported that there were still in the parish "some non-Communicants, but ready to communicate for the most part when occasion offered." In 1615 King James VI was anxious to insist upon Easter Communion in the course of his Episcopalianising campaign, but he did not care to say so. It was arranged that there be Communion everywhere on 9th April, which *happened* to be Easter, "for discovery of the recusants." At Auchterhouse in 1677 "the elders were required to enquire and try in their severall quarters if there were anie who got tickets and examined and did not communicat and delait them to the next diet of Session." The practice for a time was to have Communion on two successive Sundays, so that no persons might have an excuse for absence. The arrangement at Deer in 1615 was that a roll was made up in elders' districts, the people called, examined, given their tokens, and then a number admitted on each Sunday, "as many as the Kirk will conveniently contain and he may easily serve," and the Communion to go on as many Sundays as proved necessary. In the eighteenth century, on account of communicants from other parishes, church accommodation often proved inadequate, and the tables were



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spread out of doors. There are interesting descriptions of such Communion in Macfarlan's *Revivals of the 18th Century*. Where churches were small there has frequently in later times been resort to out-of-doors services. Urquhart Free Church Session had trouble with a man in 1878 who "laid dung on the ground set apart for the Communion services in summer and which has been used for that purpose almost since the Disruption."

It must be noted that the examination was not the only check upon the unworthy. There was the Preparation for Communion, a service appointed by the Session for the Friday or Saturday before the celebration and regarded as a necessary part of the occasion. Fasting was associated with preparation from pre-Reformation times. Gilbert Burnet says that the Presbyterians before the Restoration held a fast day on the Wednesday before Communion, with prayers and sermons for about eight or ten hours together, and then had a Preparation service on the Saturday. At Yester in 1649 and at Kilconquhar (Fife) in 1650 we have definite records of a fast day on the Thursday in addition to the Saturday preparation ; and Kilmartin Session in 1695 is found urging careful attendance on Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Often, however, when we read of fast days about this period the reference is to observances on the Sunday previous to Communion. So it was for example at Dalmellington in 1657 and at Banff in 1666. After the Revolution the Thursday Fast Day seems to have become universal. At Oldhamstocks the first use of the expression "a solemn fast . . . in order to prepare the people for the more religious

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celebrating the Lord's Supper," occurs with reference to the Thursday before Communion in 1699, the whole day to be observed as "a day of fasting and prayer." Similarly at Anstruther Easter (Fife), Inverary, Kinnell (Angus) from 1701, and at Yester from 1703.

In 1750 trouble arose in the Presbytery of Dornoch over the Fast Day arrangements. Thursday was the recognised Fast Day proper and Friday as Morren (*Annals of the Church of Scotland*) records was "usually employed by them in some more or less public act of devotion." It had been customary in the district to have "a public fellowship meeting" on the Friday, at which elders and other laymen "speak to the question." Certain of the ministers disliked the practice and tried to get rid of it by moving the Fast Day to the Friday. The Synod supported them and the matter came before the next General Assembly, which, while not prepared to settle the whole question out of hand without further investigation, "in the meantime" reversed the Synod's decision. A few years later the Synod forbade the Friday fellowship meetings "because it was usual for the minister to attend them, whose time, it was imagined, might be better employed." There was strong protest from the parishioners of Dornoch, but at the Assembly it was alleged for the Synod that these meetings bred "an humour of disputing," and that at some of them "speeches were made as long as any of those made in that house and questions put which all that house could not answer." In the end the meetings were allowed to continue. In this connection we may note a reference in Urquhart



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Free Church records to the death of an elder in 1889, where it is stated, "he was a quiet and in-offensive man and eminent for his piety and gentle disposition ; he was highly esteemed here and in the surrounding parishes ; he studied his Bible well, in which he felt himself much at home ; we shall miss his well-known form from our midst for many days, but particularly on the Question Day, when he spoke, drawing his illustrations from the Bible."

There was further the fencing of the tables by the minister publicly debarring from partaking of the elements all manner of impenitent persons. Ministers sometimes showed great ingenuity in their attempts to make the list of offences complete. At Aberdeen in 1653 those debarred included "ordinarie sleepers in time of sermon." Wightman of Kirkmahoe, in the early nineteenth century, debarred "all who use any kind of minced oaths such as losh, gosh, teth or lovenenty." Sometimes persons were excluded by name, as is evident from a Session record at Dumbarton in 1703.

The regulations for all such matters were in the care of the Kirk Session. They decided when Communion should be held. We have even a case of the Associate Session in Aberdeen refusing in 1798 to arrange for Communion and the minister in consequence being unable to celebrate it. Elders tested those to be admitted and jealously guarded the Lord's Table in the interests of discipline. Connected with this was their supervision of newcomers to the parish and persons who removed from their bounds. Until the Secessions upset Session control of the parishes a passport in the

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form of a Kirk Session testimonial was quite essential for all who changed their place of abode. In 1576 the magistrates of Edinburgh ruled that no servants be employed in the city who have not brought testimonials with them from their native parishes. At Ceres in 1649 we hear of someone who "being to remove out of the parish received a testimonial." Farm servants then as now had a habit of moving after six months or a year and the church officer used to be sent round after the term to see that the incomers had testimonials. In 1720 we have a case of a man at Keith who produced a forged testimonial from Inverness, which shows how difficult it was to settle without some evidence of character.

The Sessions were further responsible for making suitable arrangements for the Communion, had to see that the elements were duly provided by the heritors or according to custom, that the Communion tables were fitted up and cloths, cups and basins provided. Typical entries are these. At Mauchline (Ayrshire) in 1673 two of the elders were delegated to confer with the local carpenter and arrange "what will be found necessar for mounting and making readie tables and formes for the Communion." Accounts were paid at Oldhamstocks in 1701 "for nails to erect a tent on the green and for fixing the Communion tables and building a large tent of deals," and there is further reference to expenses for washing the Communion cloths, for pins to fix on the table cloths, and for "fixing some seats and furms for the convenience of communicants." Similarly at Oxnam (Roxburgh) in 1762 we have the payments :



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“ To Jno Hoggarth, wright, for setting up

the tent    ..    ..    ..    ..    5    0

To nails for the tent    ..    ..    ..    ..    1    0.”

And the Session of Alves (Elgin) in 1771 agreed with a “square wright” “to seat the area and to make the seats moveable from the one end of the kirk to the other for the greater convenience upon sacramental occasions.” It was not till the nineteenth century that the elements began to be dispensed in the pews in the fashion now almost universal. In both seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we find that very many parishes had no adequate supply of Communion vessels, and cups had to be borrowed from neighbouring churches. Yester regularly borrowed from Haddington or Bolton, and Oldhamstocks from Cockburnspath, and round about Inverness very few churches had cups of their own. At Cumbernauld in 1731 elders are nominated along with the church officer to bring home the elements.

The account so far given shows that the elders had indeed very special responsibilities with regard to Communion. But all this does not touch the question of their co-operation in the actual celebration. Yet, although not mentioned amongst the official duties of an elder, the practice to which we are accustomed prevailed from a very early date. The question would not arise so long as only a handful of Protestants were met for Communion, but when numbers began to grow those to assist would naturally be the leaders of the new movement, who would already be the elders and deacons, or would presently become such.

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Movements have their *de facto* leaders before there is any technical qualification devised.

Already in 1541 Calvin in his *Ordonnances* for Geneva incidentally indicates the existing practice when he says that no one beyond elders and deacons are to distribute the wine, and that therefore there should not be many cups. What he had written on the same subject in 1537 has no reference to elders. In France an official utterance occurs in 1563 (Quick, *Synodicon*), when enquiries were sent to Geneva and a reply received to the effect that it was certainly best if the minister himself distributed the elements to all, but that the numbers of the communicants make this impracticable and "we see no inconveniency in it that deacons and elders, being the arms and hands of the pastor, after that he hath consecrated the sacramental elements and distributed the bread and cups to them that are nearest to him, may come in to his relief and assistance and distribute them also unto those who are more remote from him." The French Synod of 1594 and others at later date emphasized the desirability of ministers distributing the wine "as much as possible." In the same year it was recorded that "elders of the church shall communicate together with the pastors at the Lord's Supper in the first place," and in 1598 it was decreed that "the bread and cup in the Holy Eucharist shall be distributed by none but the ministers and elders, who shall with their own hands put them into the respective hands of every individual communicant." And in 1609 it was stated that the cup is not to be passed from one communicant to another, but given to them by pastors if possible,



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and otherwise by elders. The Reformation was a little later in establishing itself in Holland, but it followed similar lines, and Koelman (*Het ambt en de pligten der ouderlingen en diakenen*) describes seventeenth century practice in stating that at Communion two elders assist the minister, fill the cups, and pass the elements to the people, making sure that no one under discipline partakes. He suggests it would be a good idea to follow some other countries and have lead tokens. In Hungary, where the eldership was a late development—"because of the existing feudal conditions," as Principal Kováts has explained—the people in any case come up to the table individually for the elements and receive them from the ministers direct.

In Scotland we hear of "four men" appointed to assist at the Communion in the Canongate of Edinburgh in 1564. Practice was influenced for a time by a slight misunderstanding. The Bible assigns to deacons the duty of "serving tables" (Acts vi. 2), and it is clear from Koelman that in some quarters in Holland this was thought to refer to the Communion, for he feels obliged to discuss the matter. The passage has to do only with the work of the deacon in connection with the care of the poor; but then the relation between the "love feast" and the Lord's Supper in the early days is a little confusing, and it is not surprising that the matter should all be somewhat obscure. Koelman thinks that while the deacons may fill the cups, the elders should attend to the distribution. Here—and perhaps also in Scotland—the pre-Reformation deacon may really be in mind, for

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he assisted at Communion and had special care of the cup. In any case no one had any doubt that the deacon in the Reformed Church was a kind of assistant elder, certainly of inferior rank, and that whatever a deacon could do was a proper function for an elder. The greater included the less.

At St. Andrews in 1598 we find an instruction that half the elders and deacons were to "serve the table" on each occasion. The arrangement at Elgin in 1603 was that the deacons were to "wait on the materials" and the elders to "wait on the ministration at the tables." Then at Glasgow in 1603 we have a definite statement that none are to serve at the tables but elders and deacons, but the town officers are to "bring the stoups with wine." In 1619 there was difficulty at Edinburgh, where the Session was stoutly Presbyterian, and the deacons refused to serve, so that "other honest men" had to do so. Next year a few of the deacons promised to serve and we find the ministers urging "the elders and deacons with service at the tables on Pasche day." The account by Calderwood only refers to "those who serve the tables," and does not distinguish between elders and deacons. At the Session, when the matter was discussed, a deacon was asked if he did not know what deacons were for, and he admitted that it was their function "to serve tables," with obvious reference to the Communion.

Under the increasing Episcopalian influence it was suggested at the General Assembly of 1617 that "the Communion be given to everyone severally out of the minister's hand," and at Perth



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in 1619 the minister went through the tables, being followed by those who carried bread and wine, and gave the elements to each communicant himself as they knelt. Spalding tells us that at Oldmachar the Episcopalian ministers had given each person the bread and wine "out of his owne hand." In 1639, however, after the reintroduction of Presbyterianism, the minister gave it to two or three nearest him, then each one took his own Communion bread out of the basin and in like manner the minister gave the cup to the two nearest him and each one gave the cup to his neighbour. In describing Communion in 1641 Spalding says the minister gave bread to two, and then the bason with bread was lifted by an elder and each helped himself, and so with the cup.

Brereton in his account (1635) relates that elders and deacons assisted at Communion and George Gillespie (1636) refers to "the lifting up of the bread among us by elders or deacons when in taking it off the table or setting it on, they lift it above the heads of the communicants." Lunan in his objections to Presbyterian customs (1628) found fault with the "so-called elders" taking round the bread and wine, but John Forbes, though an Episcopalian, in discussing the problem says, "there is nothing undignified in what the deacons do. Indeed it is far more in keeping that the vessels containing the elements should be handed along or carried round by them than that they should be stuck to the table and drawn or pushed about on it so quickly, for that is what will have to be done when there is a large Communion."

That the deacon did not completely lose this

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function is clear from Steuart of Pardovan, writing of the early eighteenth century. "Then having had an exhortation," he says, "he desires the elders and deacons to bring forward the elements while he cometh from the pulpit and sitteth down at the table . . . all the while the elders and deacons in a competent number and in a grave and reverend manner do attend about the table to see that none be admitted without tokens . . . and that all who are admitted may have the bread and wine."

The general custom, however, seems to have been to leave the work to the elders. In 1598 the minutes at Elgin show that "all the elderis of the north syd of the toun" are appointed to wait on the Communion "and serving thair of," some to be at each door to receive alms and tokens, and the elders of the south side to do duty the following Sunday. The Ceres elders in 1650 were directed "anent their service at the table, waiting on the basans and cups and receiving of ticketts of all yt came to the table." In 1668 at Kilbucho (Peebles) there was no Communion because the minister could not find people willing to act as elders at the Episcopalian service, and "so none to serve at the Lord's table, nor a session to inform him of the scandalous that he may debar them." At South Leith, elders were appointed in 1676 "to sit in chairs at ye head of ye tables at the ministers' backs," "to stand at the head of the tables beside the ministers for decencie and ordering of the people," and "to stand at the south and north pillars at the east end of the tables to let the people out." Elders at Aberdour (Aberdeenshire) in 1699 were set apart "to wait



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on the bread and cary it," "to attend on the communion cupes one on each side of the table," "to gather the tokens," "to wait on the elements in tym of sermon," "at each end of the table one to keep off throngs and to conduct the people in and out." Similarly at Anstruther Easter in 1701 elders were chosen "to waite upon the elements and to collect the money at the table and to take in the tokens . . . to fill the wine . . . wate at both ends of the table to prevent confusion." In the same year the record at Oldhamstocks states: "The session appoints to each elder their proper stations in collecting and serving." At Inverness in 1714 the Communion arrangements were made at a meeting where not only elders but also magistrates and heritors were present, and the elders were assigned their various duties. Burns (*Old Scottish Communion Plate*) quotes fully from the Kilmartin records a very interesting account of the arrangements for the celebration of Communion in that parish in 1699.

"Jupiter" Carlyle, referring to about the year 1748, relates that Lord Elchies, a judge of the Court of Sessions, had a curious habit when he acted as an elder at Communion. "It is the custom for elders to serve tables in sets and by turn," he says, "that all may serve and none be fatigued. When it was his turn to retire to his seat he entered it as it was close to the Communion table, but never sat down till the elements were removed, which could not be less than an hour and a half. . . . He said he thought it irreverent for anyone who ministered at the table to sit down while the sacred symbols were present."

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It ought to be noted that with regard to the Sacrament of Baptism the Session has somewhat similar responsibilities, but these have never attracted the same attention. In 1573 we have the Session at St. Andrews ordaining that a certain child may be baptised and instructing the minister to intimate that unbaptised children are to be brought to the church for baptism. The Elgin Session in 1598 gave orders that a child of a person "excommunicate for airt and pairt of the slaughter" of another be baptised, but not the children of people excommunicate "for religion." And a few years later the same Session appointed a young man of nineteen to be baptised. He was "to gif a confession of the articles of the faith publictlie and thairafter to reseave the seall and sacrament of baptising," and this at the next Sunday service before the blessing. The Session of Aberdeen ordained baptism to be administered in 1611 when required "alsweill in tyme of prayeris as in time of preaching." At Kirkcaldy in 1622 we find the Session limiting the number of "witnesses" at baptisms. Obviously the general regulation of the Sacrament was recognised to be in the Session's hands. Eighteenth century Church of Scotland Sessions seem to have left the ministers to deal with questions of baptism, and the only references appear to be in cases of discipline. Some modern Free Church records, however, show how in these congregations the Session was constantly dealing with applications for baptism and insisted upon a standard which was perhaps higher because in practice the standard for Communicants had been raised beyond general attainment. In the minutes



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of Raasay Free Church there are numerous instances in which baptism is refused to persons for themselves or for their children. In 1859 the session refused a man because of want of knowledge, "with the additional objection . . . that he has no worship in his family." Next year a baptism was permitted on the understanding that the *mother* took the baptismal engagements. In 1863 the baptism of a child was delayed because the father had been poaching ; and a year later in a number of cases the sacrament was postponed in the hope that the parents might meantime "attain to a more extensive and accurate knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of the faith," the elder of their districts to guide and instruct them. The Session agreed in 1875 that in the case of weak children private baptism might be administered. In 1880 a baptism was delayed because the father had attended "dancing parties" given by the laird to his tenants.

It has never been suggested that elders might administer the sacraments, but the account here given makes plain how closely Sessions and elders have been associated with this most important feature of religious life.

### III

## THE ELDER AT THE PLATE

ALMOST as prominent in the public eye as the Elder at Communion is the Elder at the Plate. The taking of offerings was of course inherited from the earlier Church custom, and the Collections at Scottish Churches from the Reformation were under the care of the Session and were chiefly for the benefit of the poor.

The *Ordonnances* of Geneva had required the appointment of deacons for collecting and distributing funds. This was based upon 1 Timothy iii. The *First Book of Discipline* followed on similar lines, the receivers of rents, etc., to be deacons appointed by free election year by year, but acting entirely under the instructions of minister and elders. They were to pay the various officials and consult with the Session on financial matters. The *Second Book of Discipline* continued the office as "an ordinar and perpetuall ecclesiasticall function," and called deacons "spiritual officers," referring to Scripture for guidance as to duties and qualifications. The Westminster Assembly after discussion decided to make no change; and Steuart of Pardovan, who depicts early eighteenth century conditions, indicates that the theory was unaltered, but that in practice there were in many



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places no deacons as such, their functions being performed by elders.

Just at first the policy of the Church of Scotland with regard to deacons was not perfectly clear. The General Assembly was still discussing the matter in 1577. Often the deacon was looked upon as an assistant elder. Thus when in 1562 the arrangement was made to have half-yearly Synod meetings it was decreed that the members were to include the minister of each parish "with ane elder or deacon," whereas in the *Second Book of Discipline* and always thereafter deacons were quite definitely not members of the higher courts, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.

Again, in the early days deacons had sometimes a share in the general work of the Session, including its disciplinary functions. In June, 1563, we have a case of an appeal from the sentence of "ministers, elders and deacons," and of another where deacons were included in a special Committee to judge a divorce appeal, and in the same year a complaint that in a certain district "there was no convention of elders and deacons at kirks for correction of faults." A few years later it is clear that deacons are thought of in Assembly Acts as associated with elders in the matter of discipline; and in 1574 the deacons as well as the ministers and elders of St. Andrews are in trouble about failure to proclaim a certain fast.

Later there was still occasional misunderstanding on the point, but the official view as we find it expounded both by Samuel Rutherford and by Robert Baillie was that deacons had no governing function. For a time, however, they seem to have

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maintained some connection with the administration of the Communion as has been elsewhere mentioned.

In December, 1563, the Assembly gave instruction that elders and deacons were to help the minister where necessary with visitation of the sick, and in 1631 the Elgin records refers to deacons as appointed "for wisitation of the seik." At Peebles in 1562 deacons helped the elders to choose a minister.

Deacons were definitely members of the Session. In 1584 we hear of bailies and councillors at Edinburgh appointed to meet regularly each Thursday with the ministers, elders and deacons ; and in 1602 one of the questions set down to be answered at parochial visitations by Presbyteries was whether the parish had "an established Session, consisting of elders and deacons."

The right of deacons to vote was, however, not so clear. The question was more than once raised in connection with the election of a minister. In 1659 a difference of opinion in the matter arose in Aberdeen, where some maintained that deacons had no vote at all in Sessions, and therefore none in an election, while others declared that the Act of 1649 left the voting not to the *elders* but to the *members of the Session*, and "it was notour that deacons werr memberes of sessiones as well as elders." At Meigle in the following year the Presbytery held that deacons "as members of the Session" could vote in an election.

In 1764 the same question was raised at Edinburgh when the deacons complained of having been left out of the proceedings. It was then



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admitted that deacons were members of Sessions, but stated that they had no vote in the moderation of calls. Even so late as 1888 the precise relations between elders and deacons called for definition and the General Assembly agreed that it was in accord with the constitution of the Church that deacons could only sit with the elders when specially called to discuss finance and had no vote even with regard to such matters. In 1705 overtures presented to the Assembly stated that "in parochial sessions deacons are admitted with respect to their special care and oversight of the poor of the parish." This seems a fair account of the actual practice.

The proper function of deacons is to collect and distribute money under the authority of the Kirk Session. At first under the Reformation settlement numerous deacons were appointed. The scheme accepted for Edinburgh, for example, suggested 32 deacons as against 24 elders, but there was never any uniformity of practice. It was common to have a deacon for every elder's district; but very frequently we find the number of deacons much smaller than that of elders—perhaps only two deacons for the whole parish, while sometimes some of the elders were set apart to act as deacons, and very often, especially in the country, there were no deacons at all, and the whole work was done by elders. Edgar says that at Mauchline it was the custom to ordain men as "*elders and deacons.*"

The records show that in fact there were generally deacons in towns, though one must avoid the elementary mistake of confusing these ecclesiastical officials with deacons of the trades. There is documentary evidence of the election of deacons

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in the churches of Peebles in 1562, Crail (Fife) in 1562, Lanark in 1567, Perth in 1577, Edinburgh in 1584, etc., etc. James VI enquired of the Assembly in 1597 why deacons should be elected annually. He evidently took the office for granted. It is a little later before we can find much trace of deacons in rural districts, but we may note the cases of Fetterangus 1608, Crimond 1609, Aberdour 1610, and Deer 1614, as indicated by incidental reference in Aberdeenshire Presbytery records. At Rathen in 1609 the collection is "gaddered by ye deacons at ye kirk door."

In the period of the Covenants references continue. At Alyth (Angus) in 1646 the deacons made a collection for the Burgh of Cullen, which had been burnt by the Marquis of Montrose. In the same parish a few years earlier (1638) we read of new elders and deacons being chosen and "ye auld deacons continued to serve as elders . . . qlk all wir suorn and receaved solemlie sitting before ye pulpit." James Guthrie's celebrated treatise published in 1652 was *Of Ruling Elders and Deacons*, and he mentions as "a defect and fault" in some congregations that they either leave the elders to act also as deacons or else give deacons the whole function of elders. At Mortlach (Banffshire), in the middle of the seventeenth century, we have appointments of deacons, but early in the next century we read in the Session records that "these above named elders by vicissitude serve for deacons." In 1652 deacons at Oldmachar, Aberdeen, are mentioned. We hear of deacons at Inverary in 1678, 1714, 1722, collecting, "searching," and serving at Communion.



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James Durham's *Treatise concerning Scandal* (1659) refers to deacons.

There was no change during the Episcopal period which followed. The records of Perth show regular election of deacons throughout this time, and after the Revolution Acts of Assembly make steady allusion to deacons, requiring of them qualifications similar to those of elders. John Anderson of Dumbarton, writing in 1714, argues against an Episcopalian who had asserted that there were no deacons except "in a few of the larger towns." Anderson declares "they are in every congregation where they can be had, and to my certain knowledge in the lesser as well as larger towns, yea in many country congregations." He points out that ministers are regularly asked at Presbyterial visitations whether they have deacons. We may note Balmaghie (Kirkcudbright) 1701, Speymouth (Elgin) 1732, and Dalmellington 1778 as examples of country congregations which certainly had deacons. At Anstruther Easter in 1724 certain persons "were ordained to the office of deacons in this congregation in consequence of which they took their seats in the Session and subscribed the Confession of Faith."

Writing in 1841, Lorimer tells us that there were often no deacons distinct from the elders "from the paucity of persons able and willing to discharge the duties." Norman Macleod, in his *Memoirs*, confirms this. McKerrow (*Office of Ruling Elder*) declared the office "nearly extinct." Dr. Chalmers regarded the absorption of the diaconate in the eldership as nothing less than "poisonous."

In the Secession and Relief Churches, afterwards

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forming the United Presbyterian Church, the office of Deacon was recognised, but the general practice was to have a body of managers who were not ordained, but who were responsible for congregational finance. At the same time the U.P. *Rules and Forms of Procedure* definitely states that "it is the duty of the Session to see that the poor of the congregation have suitable aid in their necessities," and that where there are no deacons the poor fund is to be administered by the Session. The Associate Church of Aberdeen (now Melville Church of the Church of Scotland) had Managers from 1757, but it was the Session, including deacons, which collected and administered the poor fund.

The Free Church placed its finances under the care of Deacons' Courts, which included minister and elders as well as deacons. Deacons if appointed for life were ordained in the same manner as elders. Some of the appointments, however, were only for short periods, and in these cases a distinction was made, those elected being "commended in prayer to the grace of God for the work." Latterly this short term diaconate was made open to women, and only in 1935 did the Church of Scotland General Assembly approve of the life diaconate being similarly open. In the United Free Church formed in 1900 the systems of the uniting bodies were carried on side by side.

The *quoad sacra* parishes, which have been a feature of nineteenth century development in the Church of Scotland, had variously constituted boards of Managers. The Church of Scotland as united in 1929 has meanwhile no uniform system, finance being administered by the Kirk Session,



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by Deacons' Court, by a Committee of Management or by a Congregational Board. An interesting experiment which contains some hope of ultimate uniformity is being made under the model constitution adopted in 1931 for *quoad sacra* parishes and now under certain conditions open to all charges. In all these cases the care of the poor fund has been recognised as a matter for the Session, in whatever manner the other finances are governed.

In the undivided Church of the Scotland of the seventeenth century and in the *quoad omnia* parishes till the nineteenth, by far the most important financial concern of the congregation was the care of the poor. The minister's stipend came from teinds and similar sources, and even the amount of it was often not known to the people. The fabric was mainly the concern of the heritors. The Church collections were consequently to all intents and purposes for the poor ; and as a small contribution was generally sufficient to meet the need a tradition of small contributions was established, which it is proving extremely difficult to overcome now that the purpose of the collections is quite different.

The function of the Kirk Session with regard to the poor was not merely a matter of ecclesiastical practice, but also one regulated by the law of the land. The care of the poor was assigned to the Church under an Act of Parliament of 1574 as revised in 1579. Many later Acts of Parliament (e.g., 1597, 1617, 1661, 1698, 1725, 1771, etc.) modified the arrangements ; but no fundamental change was made until the voluntary method

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collapsed under the conditions produced by the Industrial Revolution, and the Poor Law of 1845 secularised the function and established the method of taxation. The breakdown of the former system was assisted by the fact that it was only the collections at the Parish Church that were available for the poor of the whole parish, and the growth of the secession Churches meant a serious loss in this respect, for they had only obligations to the poor amongst their actual members and required their collections for other purposes. Soon after the Free Church came into existence the State had taken over the responsibility, and the Free Church Declaratory Act of 1848 states that "in the circumstances in which the Church is now placed the main and primary object of the ordinary church door collections must necessarily be the supplementing of ministers' stipends, it being for the most part more expedient that the relief of the poorer members of the Church should be provided for by occasional and extraordinary appeals."

In the Church of Scotland, whether deacons were appointed or not, the full responsibility in connection with collections lay with the Kirk Session, and popular opinion associated the elder very specially with his duties at the plate.

Custom as to method of collection varied at different times and in different places. Sometimes it was taken as the church door, outside or inside, or at the kirkyard gate. Sometimes it was taken within the church during the service. In 1573 the General Assembly ruled that collections be taken "only at the kirk doores." At Markinch elders were posted at the door "so as to keep ye people



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from raming past without putting anything in ye box." In 1574 the collection for the poor at Aberdeen was "at the kirk dure," and in 1616 we hear of the "tass" at the door and in 1621 of the bailies, council, and elders with "others of the most honest rank of persons," to stand at the kirk door and collect, while after the Revolution settlement the Town Council had trouble with Episcopalian elders who insisted upon standing at the church door and taking the collection. At Elgin in 1591 someone was accused of "rufuising of the puiis bred" (board), and elders were ordained to stand and collect in turn in the most convenient place. Boyndie (Banffshire) Kirk Session in 1625 decided to take the collection at the door "for escheuing of confusione and withdrawing of the people's harts from devotion and better exercis of thair minds," while similarly at Fordyce (Banffshire) in 1627 a similar change was made and at Galston (Ayrshire) the collections began to be taken at the door in 1635. In August, 1647, the Presbytery of Turriff agreed that the collections be "gathered in all the kirks of the Pbrrie be the elders at the kirk doores," and in the following year the General Assembly passed an Act forbidding collections during service as being "a very great and unseemly disturbance of divine worship." At Elgin in April, 1648, there is a curious entry. The minister complained about the smallness of the collection, and it was arranged that the collection was to be made "at the kirk door befor sermon and not after sermon within the kirk as befor," and that all the elders were to collect every Sunday, and "that they require

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from all that enters the kirk doore." Elders were in trouble at Oldhamstocks in 1649 for being late in arriving to take the contribution at the church door, and at Ceres in 1659 we hear of an elder being slandered as "not worthy to stand and hold a broad at the kirk door." In 1676 the Session of Essil ordered the collection to be now at the door "becaus the people were so throng in the body of the church that ther was no collecting off it within doors," while at Alyth in the same year it was decided that the collection "whilk formerly was in the time of the singing of the Psalms shal be heirafter gon about befor the psalmes begin." At Grange in 1680 it was arranged that in the summertime the collection should be at the door.

"Brod" or board seems to have been the common name for the plate. In 1634 an Elgin elder was charged with refusing to collect with the "brode" at the church door, and in 1650 the Session there agreed with a wright to make a "broad for gathering the poor's money at the kirk door." At Yester in 1652 we hear of "a new box, with two broads for our collections." In the Kirkcaldy records for 1678 there is mention of "the elder that held the brod." Other words are sometimes used. Oldmachar had "two tassess" at the door in 1645, one for the fabric and one for the poor. In the following century we hear of the elders at Elgin who "stand at the basons," and find that the congregation possessed four pewter basons for collections, six stools on which to set them, and eight napkins for the stools. In 1702 Keith Session bought "two stools to collect the



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offering." At Cullen (Banffshire) bad money was melted down to make a cup to collect the poor's money at the Communion tables. At Dumbarton in 1699 "two collection cups" were sold and instead "two large tinn plates" were bought. J. F. S. Gordon speaks of a baptismal basin, and even silver Communion cups being to his knowledge used at church doors for collections. The use of the ladle was common in certain parts of the country in the mid-nineteenth century. At Oldmachar in 1869 the Session discussed the relative advantages of ladles and plates. Sometimes one reads of "the box." At Glencairn (Dumfries) in 1879 the collection was taken by means of "receiving boxes." Ladles are still in use in various churches—for example Newhills (Aberdeenshire) and Cullen. The shaft of such ladles was sometimes long, sometimes short, the box sometimes open, sometimes partially covered. There are several specimens in the Scottish Antiquarian Museum in Edinburgh. Collection at the door seems to have been very general at the date of the *New Statistical Account*.

At Anstruther Easter there was originally a plate at the doors. In 1717 we hear of "two old chargers for gathering the collections." In 1721 the collections on Communion Sunday were gathered "at the stiles, the ordinary without and the extraordinary within at stair heads." In 1746 a member of the congregation presented a brass plate which he happened to possess, and another member who was known to have the neighbour of it readily agreed to give it also, and these were in use till the nineteenth century,

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and are still in evidence for retiring collections. Then ladles came into use, but these were replaced by small metal plates. When the minister was absent and there was no service, the collection was nevertheless taken "at the bridge-end." In Kirkcudbright at the close of the eighteenth century there were separate collection plates for the town and the landward poor. At Kilrenny (Fife) also there were two plates at the gate of the kirkyard, one watched by the Town elders and the other by the Landward elders. Separate accounts were kept and the poor supported from the appropriate box. There was also in the Session's keeping a "mid-box" for marriage contract and other incidental fees, and there was a "sea-box" which was largely in civil hands for relief among the fishermen. The plates rested upon stools and in comparatively modern times the elders stood inside the Session house which was near the gate, and in bad weather had the protection of glass windows specially placed in the door. The elders of Stow Burgher congregation in 1760 complained of the cold in collecting at the door, and it was agreed to have the collection taken in the church. The Session at Banff in 1765 had boxes erected so that the collecting elders "would be screened from the inclemency of the weather." A small sentry-box with glass windows was likewise provided for the elders at the doors of the South Parish Church and St. Clement's Parish Church in Aberdeen in the early nineteenth century, and these may now be seen in the Art Gallery at Aberdeen.

Recent practice has very largely made the collection part of the service. It has been felt



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that the offering is a devotional act; and from a very different point of view it has been calculated that larger collections are obtained when requested in face of the assembled congregations, and altogether money has come to have a much greater place in the thought of Church officials, and the collection has assumed an importance which it did not formerly possess. There is no uniformity of practice. The collection in church is taken by elders or by deacons or managers (including women), sometimes by young men who may later become office-bearers. Sometimes the collection is by metal or wooden tray, or by small baskets. Sometimes it is brought to the Communion table in procession, sometimes by the individual collectors separately. Sometimes it is simply laid on the table, sometimes received by the minister on an alms-dish. Sometimes a special prayer of dedication is offered, which must have the effect of strengthening the feeling of the responsibility of Christian giving. And as a rule the collections in church are by no means all that is required in the way of offering, and they have to be supplemented by the efforts of Lady Collectors and through Sales of Work and even by means of entertainments. The problem of Church finance is a most serious one, as is evident from such books as those of Mr. Keay and Lord Sands. The Free Will Offering method now so widely adopted usually works well for a time ; but it is difficult to keep up, and special collections seem to push themselves forward in spite of it. An Association for Christian Stewardship has recently been formed in the Church of Scotland and is trying to think things out.

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The Reformation Church inherited responsibility for the care of the poor and the afflicted, and valiantly faced its duty in the matter, so that until the Industrial Revolution with the attendant development of town and city population, no serious difficulty was felt. The local Kirk Session, with its intimate knowledge of the parishioners and their circumstances and characters, was a body that could be trusted to be both just and merciful. The poor were never pampered, but had the bare necessities of life brought within their reach, under strict supervision and with every encouragement to independent effort. The standard of living until the middle of the eighteenth century was low, and normally the trifling voluntary contributions of the churchgoers were in most places adequate to the needs of the poor. Many parishes—for example, Edzell (Angus) and Rerrick (Kirkcudbright)—claimed in the *Old Statistical Account* at the close of the eighteenth century that their funds had always been quite sufficient to maintain the necessitous.

In times of special stress special means were taken to raise funds. Elders would go round the parish and collect, or some heritor would make a generous gift to tide over the crisis. In 1741 we find the Session of Culross buying lint and distributing it to the poor who could spin, paying them for their work and selling it. At Birnie (Elgin) in 1783 the Session bought meal wholesale and dispensed it rather than give the poor small sums of money to purchase it more expensively for themselves. Similarly at Kirkurd (Peebles), Abernyte (Angus) and other places in that same



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famine year ; and much the same was done at Daviot (Aberdeenshire) in 1800. In towns the Session naturally had the active co-operation of the magistrates, and in the country the heritors watched the intromissions of the elders on account of the assessment which any shortage might entail. The heritors in any case were entitled to half the collections from 1693, and the Humble case in 1751 made clear how considerable were the rights of the heritors in the whole matter.

Widows and orphans and foundlings, incurables and idiots, aged and infirm, the victims of accident and misfortune were the normal recipients of a pittance which more or less sufficed. Food, clothing, education and even coffins were supplied to the needy. There were both regular pensioners and occasional claimants. Considerable effort was made to prevent funds intended for the parish poor finding their way into the hands of "sturdy beggars" and other undesirables from beyond the bounds. The parishes had lists of regular dependents, who were helped at intervals according to a local scale, but as a rule such a roll contained only from a dozen to twenty names, and often other needy persons were simply licensed to beg. Thus at Grange in 1688 such poor as could "travel" were invited to obtain tokens permitting them to beg within the parish. They "refused all unanimously;" but this became the custom, and in 1742, after correspondence with the heritors regarding an Act made at Banff by the Justices of the Peace, the Session ranked the poor into classes, finding that six were unable "by reason of old age, distress and infirmity," to travel and beg for their substance,

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whom they consequently put upon the poor roll of the Session, while eighteen incapable of work but able to beg were given badges. At Fordyce in 1741 the Session agreed to maintain a foundling "till it was capable to do for itself by begging," and in 1746 this child was "dismissed to beg its bread." In 1725 the Ayrshire J.P.'s had instructed the Sessions to provide for the poor "by weekly collections, rents and interests of mortifications and begging with certificates within the parish." Comrie, in the *Old Statistical Account*, reports, "the poor are permitted to beg in the parish." Similarly at, for example, Dailly (Ayrshire) and Kilcalmonell (Argyll). The local beggars were generally protected by their badges from unfair competition from without. Some effort was made to see that people gave reasonably to the parish beggars. There was often a kind of local tariff. It must be remembered that it was easier for the parishioners to give in kind to beggars than to subscribe money at church.

"Sturdy beggars" seem to have caused a great deal of trouble and to have been at times very numerous. Early in the seventeenth century Aberdeenshire Presbyteries regularly enquired of Sessions whether they employed anyone to keep the parish clear of these pests. Alyth was paying a man for this purpose in 1649. No doubt Fletcher of Saltoun's account of things in 1698 is greatly exaggerated, but the nuisance continued right up to the time of the 1845 Poor Law, as is shown by statements from all parts of the country both in the *Old* and in the *New Statistical Account*. The parish poor at Aberdour (Aberdeenshire)



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were given tokens in 1620, and so at Aberdeen in 1650 ; and after the Act of 1696 badges for the licensed local poor were common. We find them in use at Keith in 1730, and persisting there till 1845. In 1722 Inverness Session issued "badges of distinction made of hard peuter." Stirling had badges in 1699 and the matter came up again at various dates, the difficulty being with beggars who came in from the surrounding country. The citizens were forbidden by the Town Council to give to badgeless beggars, but in 1774 there was still trouble with these. The beggars with local licences were often termed "blue-gowns" and "gaberlunzies." In Edie Ochiltree the type has been immortalised. Aberdour Session (Fife) was enquiring in 1660 "what poor ones need blue gounes." Oldmachar Session in 1793 gave testimonials to a couple of "bluegowns." In connection with the "frequent" communions of the post-Revolution evangelicals beggars seem to have gathered in great numbers, and we have such surprising entries as at Logie in 1696 : "To above 180 poor folk being the Thanksgiving day after the Communion, £10 13 4," and in 1697 : "To 200 poor folk and upwards that gathered here at the Communion, £6 0 0."

Sometimes the Sessions did find themselves rather in difficulties to maintain their poor, and made complaint. Thus at Ceres in 1659, at Kilmarnock in 1674, at Grange in 1680, at Lauder in 1681, the members were urged to enlarge their charity. At St. Andrews in 1641 the church-door collections had to be supplemented by a house to house collection of food for the poor. At Elgin in

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1635 the elders went round the town collecting contributions for the poor. The straitening was more obvious in the eighteenth century. Local collections and mortifications were proving insufficient at Anstruther Easter in 1735, and there is an entry of a payment to someone "for advancing to the poor when the funds fell short," while a public meeting was further called to discuss ways and means. The matter again required consideration in 1751. In that same year the people in one part of the parish of Fordyce were assessing themselves for their poor in so many fish according to their profits for the three winter months, other methods having failed. At Yester a deficit was foreshadowed in the budget set forth under date 1728, as follows :

“ Collections at the kirk door, mort-			
cloths and bells by a medium			
produce yearly	398	1	8
Rent of the poor's land per annum			
the few duety being deducted	058	17	4
Interest of money lent out produce			
yearly	042	06	0
	<hr/>		
Sum	499	05	0
	<hr/>		
To the monthly pensionis yearly			
by a medium	368	16	0
To bursars and other incidental			
charges yearly by a medium	221	05	0
	<hr/>		
	590	01	0.”



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In this parish the heritors interfered with recommendations that the poor money might be better managed and a "stent" or assessment thus avoided, and they passed a rule that Session money was not to be lent or disposed of without their consent. In 1650 in the same parish a "stent" had been necessary and had been imposed on lairds and tenants at so much per plough. "Stents" were more frequent in the next century, as at Mauchline, Galston and other places in Ayrshire in 1736, and again for a considerable period from 1771. At Aberdour (Fife) the Session in 1773 declared that "the necessitous have not been and never are half supplied by all that is in the Session's hands to give."

The collections in the plate were often extremely small. Oxnam parish in Roxburghshire had fair mortifications and no trouble about providing for its poor, but the collections were at times amazingly small. In 1784 they seldom exceeded a shilling a Sunday and were frequently under sixpence, while on three Sundays in the spring the collection was 1½d., and on two Sundays it was nothing. At Keith on one Sunday in 1721 the collection was so small that the Session gave it "to buy oil to the clock." On the other hand the Session at Birnie in 1732 was one day surprised to find "a white shilling" in the box, and thought it must be a mistake, but ordered it "in the meantime to be given to a poor distressed child." Bad copper, obsolete and foreign coins were very common in the eighteenth century. There are constant references to this in all parts of the country until well on in the nineteenth century. We hear of

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foreign doits, Edinburgh half-pennies, Scots bodles, turners, hibernias and harps, "flower-de-luces," etc. As early as 1618 the Kirkcaldy Session decreed that any elder who received bad money at the kirk door would have to make it good out of his own pocket. Hawick reports bad coin in 1704. In 1726 the Tulliallan Session (Perthshire) intimated "to give no bad coins to the collection." Similarly at Elgin in 1730. At Keith in 1739 the minute states: "This day the proportions were enlarged to the poor by reason of bad copper, being obliged to give two for one." The practice continued, and an Act of Parliament of 1771 which affected currency made the matter even worse. Montrose Session in 1780 sold 63 lb. of bad copper on condition that the coins were melted and so put out of circulation. In 1789 the Oxnam Session minutes have the entry: "To cash received for 30/- worth of bad halfpence at 5d. per lb.—5/-."

There were collections not only at ordinary Sunday services but also at week-day sermons, and on the occasion of baptisms and marriages, while sometimes in connection with funerals sums were handed over to the poor. Thus the Ceres records note collections at the christening of a child of Sir Thomas Hope of Craighall in 1683, at the marriage of Lord Rosehill and Lady Elizabeth Lyndesay in 1669, and twelve dollars "given in ye box" at Mrs. Mary Hope's burial in 1682. In 1657 the beadle claimed a collection at a marriage, but he was told he would get nothing of what the elders collected at the door, but only what he could collect himself. We find the Inverary Session in 1679 distributing a collection made at a certain



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laird's marriage. At Anstruther Easter there was a collection at the baptism of a laird's son in 1678, and in 1674 there is a record of a sum "given be Wm. Young freely to ye poor before his marriage." In the parish of Yester in 1652 collections at weekday services went to the beadle if there was a baptism or marriage and otherwise to the poor. Still more interesting are collections at Aberdeen in 1630 and 1631 reported as taken at private communions. Even at the close of the eighteenth century Kirkoswald (Ayrshire) records "collections at private baptisms and marriages."

The ordinary church-door collections were generally supplemented on Communion Sunday by a collection at the Tables. We read of this at Aberdeen in 1618, where two magistrates were stationed at the end of each table to "demand of everie communicant at their ryising from the table sume almes to the poor." A man was charged with blasphemy at Strathdon (Aberdeenshire) in 1675 because he had declared: "This day the minister did invite me to a free feast without money and without price, and yet I was no sooner sotten doune than Mr. Michael Elphinstone came and took my eight pennies from me and I would have bought as much bread and wyne in Aberdeen for a bawbie." At Crail in 1680, at Dunfermline in 1688, and at Montrose in 1691, we have a definite record of collections on Communion Sunday, both at the doors and at the tables. Lamont's *Diary* tells us that at Scoonie (Fife) the collection at the table was stopped in 1649 because of the Assembly's objection to the disturbance of worship. Fordyce parish in 1745 had a special "large peuther dish" for

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collecting at Communion. In Kinellar parish (Aberdeen) "2 pewter quaichs" were used for the collection at the Tables. The Communion collections were generally very large compared with the weekly offerings. In the middle of the seventeenth century the ordinary collection at Yester was seldom over 30/- Scots, but on Communion Sunday it was at least a dozen times as much. A hundred years later the average ordinary collection at Oxnam was not above 2/-, but the Communion collections amounted to over £3. The special Communion occasions, which were common under the eighteenth century evangelicals, brought large crowds together. Thomas Boston tells us that at Ettrick in 1731 he distributed 777 tokens and the collections amounted to £77 13s. 4d.

The Session had generally other resources besides the ordinary church-door collections. There was for example the parish mortcloth hired for use at funerals, with or without a handbell. Sometimes a Session had several mortcloths of varying grandeur with varying charges, and the money obtained went into the kirk box. The mortcloth might even (at a special rate) be hired outwith the parish. The Peebles mortcloth is described in 1630 as being "of fyne black claith, lynit throw with blak buckassie and compassit round about with ane blak silk frenzie." A mortcloth for Ceres in 1670 cost £133 19s. 10d. Scots, of which £62 11s. 2d. was for the fringes, £3 12s. for Boston lining, £1 10s. "for a pock to carrie it," and £1 6s. 8d. for the making of it. Rathven (Banffshire) in 1688 had two mortcloths, one for gentlemen and the other for yeomen and the poor, and here



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as in many other places there was also a handbell for hire. At Oldhamstocks about 1720 there is frequent reference to "the worst mortcloth." Where a mortcloth was gifted, the donor sometimes reserved the right of its free use for himself and his family. At Crieff a mortcloth was bought in 1711, the proceeds to be accumulated to pay off the cloth and thereafter to be funded to provide a new cloth when necessary, the funds to be lent at interest and the interest devoted to the poor. A new cloth was required in 1751, and it was remitted to a neighbouring minister to "buy as much velvet, fringes, shaloon and glazed linen as will be necessary for that purpose at Edinburgh as he was to go there next week to the General Assembly." Fordyce paid £11 sterling for a new cloth in 1769, and officially pronounced it "extremely genteel." We find objection taken at Kincardine (on Forth) in 1688 to someone "making private gain of a mortcloth to the prejudice of the poor in the parish who were greatly helped by the incomes of the public mortcloth given out by the Session." At Logie (near Stirling) in 1782 a public Committee bought a hearse and the profits were applied to the poor. A few years later a heritor presented clothes for the horses and a coat for the driver and the poor benefited again, for an extra charge was made to all who made use of these ornaments. But in 1829 there was a complaint that people were "using a hearse without a mortcloth and thereby defrauding the poor of the parish." The fact was that mortcloths were going out of fashion, and to make up for this the Session had to invent a charge for "spokes, spades, etc.," at burials.

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Then there were fines which, according to Act of Parliament of 1567, delinquents had to pay in addition to suffering other punishment, and later fines tended to become a substitute for other punishment—somewhat like indulgences in Luther's day. Such money went partly to church officers, but the poor certainly benefited. In the nineteenth century public opinion revolted against such a way of providing for the poor, and it was finally forbidden by the General Assembly. A remarkably early case occurs at Yester in 1623 when a man offered to pay a higher penalty if excused some of the public appearances, and the Session in regard to the condition of the poor at the time agreed, and expressed their willingness to do the same in other cases. At Rathven on the other hand in 1752 someone offered a greater penalty to avoid public appearances, but the Session refused. In 1720 at Fordyce two individuals called a certain woman "witch faced carlin" and "brazen faced quean," and were ordered to pay 20/- and be rebuked before the congregation, or 40/- and be rebuked before the Session. A man was permitted in the same parish in 1747 to make his appearances without sackcloth on paying a guinea to the poor. The Alyth Kirk Session in 1761 offered a choice : those who did not wish to go to the place of repentance could pay £12 Scots. An interesting case occurred at Bellie (Elgin) in 1765, when a guilty couple who were Roman Catholics were allowed to satisfy before the priest, but had to pay the recognised penalty to the Session for the poor. At Alves (Elgin) in 1662 the records state that "for the encouragement of the kirk officer each delinquent



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who shall be censured shall pay sixteen pennies Scots to said officer." About this time there are a number of protests from Sessions' that as Justices of Peace are now taking the fines of delinquents the poor are suffering, the collections alone not being sufficient to meet their needs. Stobo Session (Peebles) made this complaint in 1657, the Glasgow Session in 1662, and that of Dalmellington in 1711. Fordyce Session in 1704 ruled that persons unable to pay their penalty were to stand bareheaded in the joughs between the second and third bells. Towards the close of the eighteenth century the mere payment of a fine was accepted in many parishes in lieu of public appearances.

There were also cases of direct fining for offences. In some places we hear of elders fined for absence from Session meetings. Fines by magistrates for ecclesiastical offences came to the Session. Some civil penalties also found their way into the poor-box according to law. Kirk Sessions still benefit from the misdoings of poachers. At Logie in 1722 we have the entry: "received as ye halfe of an fine from the Sherrif of Clackmannan taken from one in this parish for swearing—£1 0 0." At Oldmachar in 1641 a fine of 6/8 was imposed by the Session on anyone bringing a dog into the church, and at Elgin in 1646 on anyone letting his horse into the kirkyard, while later at Glencairn there are several records of money derived from the sale of stray sheep. The Sessions also profited by forfeited pledges, as at Alyth in 1638 and 1642, where sums of 40/- and more came into the kirk box because marriage had not followed proclamation. Those proposing to be married had always to find

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caution, and this is often called "consignment money." Fordyce in 1758 exacted a crown for the poor from persons who had celebrated a "penny wedding." Sessions sometimes demanded payment for permission to erect "dasks" or pews in church, or themselves charged rents for seats they had built. A charge is also occasionally recorded for setting up tombstones, as at Kirkcaldy in 1676. A curious source of income occurs more than once in the Kirkcaldy records about 1642—a sum of money voted by the crew of a ship during a violent storm!

Most Sessions accumulated mortifications in the course of the generations. Some had considerable trusts under their care, and many of these have been well guarded and still exist. Frequently these mortifications made all the difference to the condition of the poor. The parish of Auchterderran (Fife) in answers to the queries in connection with the *Statistical Account* of 1790 stated that because of legacies their poor were "pretty well off," but added that "in many of the neighbouring parishes it would make one's heart bleed to see their misery and the want of means to relieve them." They add that their own church collections for the poor "do not exceed two shillings each Sabbath." Sessions generally lent out their money at interest. This was universal in the days before banks, but we find entries in Alves Session records even in 1823 and 1833, which show that 3,000 merks had been lent to Lord Seafeld, and in those years he reduced and further reduced the amount of interest he was willing to pay. A characteristic notice occurs in the Session minutes of Anstruther



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Easter in 1718 : "The minister acquainted the Session that Mistres Kellock desires the loan of an hundred merks out of the box and that she and her son-in-law Colin Thomson would give bond for the same. The Session agrees." The investment was not always fortunate, as for example at Yester where we find that in 1728 a borrower was in difficulties and the Session accepted a composition, stating their decision that "they had better take the hundred merks than to distress the poor man and perhaps not get payment in the end."

The manner in which the poor relief was distributed naturally varied. Sometimes we have quarterly or half-yearly disbursements of money which had accumulated from Sunday to Sunday, and had been kept at the Manse in the kirk-box, of which separate elders kept the two keys. Sometimes the collection was given away each week. Thus in Aberdeen in 1621 the poor received money from the deacons every Monday after morning prayer which they had to attend. At Ceres in the same year the Session met on Tuesdays, and "after prayer according to the ordinary custome the collection upon the preceding Sabbath was distributed to the pensioners." Here also in 1654 we find the collection on a particular Sunday "distributed between a distressed gentleman and a lame sojourner," while in 1660 a collection of £30 Scots at Communion was immediately distributed to the poor. The records of this parish show that even in 1662, when for a time Sessions were discharged from doing their business, the elders met for the distribution of the poor money.

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Although the poor had a principal claim upon the funds at the disposal of the Session, that body had of course other financial responsibilities. It paid its clerk and officer or at least supplemented what these received by way of fees. There were often small repairs which could not be laid to the charge of the heritors or were declined by them. The Session at Tulliallan in 1695 paid for a clock in the church steeple, because Sabbath-breaking fishers sometimes alleged ignorance of the time. The Ceres Kirk Session had to mend a form broken at Communion in 1657, and in 1660 had to put glass in a window "foirrence the pulpit." At Oldmachar there was a special collection plate for the fabric in the middle of the seventeenth century. At Inverness and Stirling in the following century we have reference to obligations which the Town Councils had placed upon these burgh congregations to contribute towards repairs. There was, indeed, often a good deal of friction with the Councils in the larger towns as to their precise responsibilities in the matter of upkeep. At Aberdour (Aberdeenshire) in 1701 the Session had to put out £1 1s. 6d. "to buy a sackcloth," and also at a cost of 5/- had made out of an old broken boat a "four-nooked big stool," "an ell high," to stand "in the mids of the floor before the pulpit to be a terror to faulters that they may come from the remote public places and stand ther when the minister rebukes them." Cumbernauld Session in 1739, having repeatedly asked the heritors to mend some windows broken by a violent storm, ultimately in disgust had them glazed at their own expense. Examples of small outlays are 10/8 to the kirk



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officer at Falkirk in 1618 for "thecking the steiple;" 6/8 "for making a collection broad" at Grange in 1732, and something for a new half-hour sand-glass at the same place in 1752; and again at Fordyce in 1740 a small expenditure on poison for the rats in the churchyard. Contributions periodically were expected for bursars at the Universities, and local expenses in connection with education were frequently shared with the heritors.

One comes across curious examples of local charity. A collection was taken at Ceres in 1661 to help two men "to buy two horses to call coales with, their beastes being dead," while in the same parish in 1683 £6 was given to a woman "who had her house and all her goods except her husband and family" destroyed by fire. At Grange in 1693 a case is recorded of assistance to a man "for making of fetters and shakles to his demented son." The conditions of a miner's existence are revealed by an entry at Oldhamstocks in 1683: "to ane coallior *belonging* to Sir William Nicollsone." In the same district in 1701 something was given "for cureing a poor orphan's face dangerously wounded by a horse's foot," and in 1759 1/6 was given to "two poor objects." Paupers had to have doctors' bills paid or had to be buried and their winding sheets and perhaps the use of the public coffin provided. Fordyce Session in 1773 gave a man 5 ells of the old Communion cloth as a winding sheet for his wife. It is to be noted that the effects of paupers went at their death to the Session. Thus at Daviot in 1786 we read: "Given in to the Session for the effects of a roup

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belonging to Ann Selbie, 10/-." Ann Selbie had been a pensioner for some years.

In the seventeenth century there were many special demands for congregational contributions to assist in building bridges and harbours. At Lonmay (Aberdeenshire) in 1620 the Session was exhorted by the Presbytery "to have a care of the bridges and common roads within the parish that they suffered not that work well begun among them to decay." In 1657 at Ceres we hear of £9 taken out of the box to pay for the timber for a local bridge. But collections were made for bridges in other parts, and often for harbours, which no doubt were regarded as likely to benefit the general trade of the country. We may take as an example of the kind of special collections for outside objects which are a feature of all the records, those which occur in the minutes of Stobo Kirk Session: 1604, city of Geneva and fire at Peebles; 1624, fire at Dunfermline; 1650, a regiment of defence against Cromwell; 1651, levy in connection with visit to London to discuss liberation of captive ministers; 1652, Scottish prisoners in England; 1652, Bo'ness prisoners in Turkish hands—in this case "nothing can be gotten, in regard to the people's deep poverty;" 1654, burned "lands" in Edinburgh; 1655, prisoners at Holyrood; 1656, North Berwick Harbour; 1658, Dunbar harbour, a bridge at Carsphairn, a minister's widow; 1659, a bridge over Tyne; 1661, harbour at Saltpreston; 1661, fire in Pleasance of Edinburgh; 1664, a man become blind; 1665, Whithorn and Coalburn harbours; 1666, a woman in Portpatrick; 1697, Church at Königsberg;



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1709, German church in London ; 1722, man in slavery among Turks ; 1724, congregation at Carrickfergus in Ireland ; 1731, a reformed congregation at Copenhagen, and Protestants in Lithuania ; 1738, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary ; 1752, Protestants of Pennsylvania ; 1754, College of New Jersey (now Princeton) ; 1756, educating Gaelic-speaking students ; etc. Some of these collections were recommended or required by Privy Council, others by Assembly, Synod or Presbytery. One notices how, gradually, certain matters are taken over by the State and how the interest of the Church turns in other directions. By the nineteenth century the Schemes of the Church began to make their appearance, and the Church had lost its special responsibility for many of the objects that had earlier demanded its attention and drawn forth its charity. The Poor Law of 1845 completely altered the situation. Dr. Thomas Chalmers's Glasgow experiment was the last supreme effort of the voluntary system of poor relief. But ever since the Reformation the Church through its Sessions had served the country nobly as the source and agent of charity.

The elder is at the plate in view of his responsibility as collector and distributor of money, but it may be well to mention that his thoughts need not be absolutely confined to the actual collection, and perhaps this chapter could scarcely finish more fittingly than with a quotation from a late nineteenth century church magazine—the *Record* of Kirkwall U.P. Church in 1894 : " They are not there for the mere purpose of ' standing at the plate ' as the saying is . . . but for the purpose

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of giving a kindly welcome to the worshippers as they pass—were it but a pleasant smile or nod of recognition. A shake of the hand would not be out of place in some instances, and a word of inquiry respecting the health of those at home. This would show the kind of interest which managers and elders are expected to take in the membership of the congregation. In the case of a stranger coming in he should be courteously shown to a seat. All of us should do what we can to promote each other's comfort, to encourage each other in well-doing, and to foster the spirit of brotherly love. These are simple and elementary matters, but we require to be reminded of them."



#### IV

### KIRK SESSION DISCIPLINE

KIRK Session Discipline has been subjected to extremely severe criticism. One of the most frequently quoted attacks is that which appears in the *Memoirs* of Ewen Cameron of Lochiel (1629-1719), where we are told : " Every parish had a tyrant who made the greatest Lord in his district stoop to his authority. The kirk was the place where he kept his court ; the pulpit his throne or tribunall from whence he issued out his terrible decrees ; and 12 or 14 soure, ignorant enthusiasts, under the title of elders, composed his councill. If any, of what quality soever, had the assurance to disobey his edicts, the dreadful sentence of excommunication was immediately thundred out against him, his goods and chattells confiscated and seazed, and he himself, being looked upon as activally in the possession of the devill and irretriveably doomed to eternal perdition, all that conversed with him were in no better esteem." This statement is both inaccurate in detail and unfair as a whole, but it seems to form the basis of the elaborate caricature by Buckle, and of the singularly unjust account by the Episcopalian historian, J. P. Lawson, in the *Spottiswoode Miscellany*. Lecky has followed Buckle. An English pamphlet of 1649 offers " a faire warneing to take heed of the

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Scottish discipline, as being most injurious to the Civill magistrate." In our own time Edwin Muir finds the Discipline a particularly tempting point for assault in the Calvinistic scheme, and is careful to remark that the *First Book of Discipline* "opened with a command to persecute and almost closed with a plea for the extension of the scope of capital punishment." J. Y. T. Greig, also, in his *Life of Hume*, gives a vivid but distorted account of the Discipline early in the eighteenth century. David Masson was more historical when he called the system "half horrible, half noble." But even the minister of Elie (Fife), writing in the *New Statistical Account*, found the system indefensible.

Calvin regarded Discipline as "the ligaments by which the members of the body are joined together and kept each in its proper place." It was primarily for the work of Discipline that in the churches of the Calvinistic Reformation Kirk Sessions were instituted.

We require to note that care of Discipline had from the earliest days been an important Church function. The New Testament leaves no doubt of that. And the history of Penance is a large subject with which every student of the Pre-Reformation Church must deal. The Reformed Churches took over Discipline as they took over Worship and Government. Calvin and Knox did not invent Church Discipline.

Neither was Discipline as practised under Calvinism seriously different from what people had known before. Constant petty intrusion into individual and communal life was the policy of mediæval authorities both ecclesiastical and civil.



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And when attention is called to the crudely stern character of Scottish Discipline in the seventeenth century, we must carefully recall the standards of the time, and remember that it was the State and the condition of the people rather than the Calvinistic system that dictated the forms of satisfaction demanded.

It may be worth while dwelling upon this, for Knox and his successors are frequently assailed in forgetfulness of it. One should judge them in the light of what is revealed by such a book as Parry's *History of Torture in England* (1933), or Theodor Hampe's study of *Crime and Punishment in Germany* (Eng. trans. 1929), or the illuminating article on *Use and Forms of Judicial Torture in England and Scotland*, in *Scot. Hist. Rev.* for April, 1905.

One should remember the place played in civil treatment of crime by the rack and the wheel, the boot and the red-hot pincers, the bilboes and pilniwinkis, "Little Ease" and "the Scavenger's Daughter." It is said that some 70,000 persons were executed in England in the reign of Henry VIII, and before 1820 nearly 200 different offences involved capital punishment. Robert Leighton's father lost his ears and had his nose slit. William Carstares was tortured with thumbscrews. There were the persecutions of the Covenanters in Scotland, and the judicial proceedings of Judge Jeffreys in England. Women were drowned in the Nor' Loch early in the seventeenth century and one in the Loch of Spynie at the end of the century for theft. Witches were burned in hundreds in England and on the Continent in the seventeenth century.

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The punishment for Treason continued to be a most ghastly piece of vindictive brutality. In 1783 a woman was burnt in England for murdering her husband, and in 1789 one was burnt alive for coining. Branding was not abolished till 1829. In 1831 a boy of nine was hanged for setting a house on fire. Executions took place in public in England till the 'sixties of last century. And we recall the state of prisons when Howard began his campaign, and how the *Edinburgh Review* of 1819 thought to settle the question of the boy chimney sweep by stating that "humanity is a modern invention and there are many chimneys in old houses that cannot be swept in any other manner." Conditions of child labour, of factories and mines everywhere in the eighteenth century, the attitude to animals, to lunatics and defectives, and the common use of jugs, branks, stocks, and ducking stools by civil authorities have to be kept in mind. Popular ignorance, brutishness and superstition set a standard above which the Church was slow to rise. But it was not Calvinism that invented the views of punishment which regulated the decisions of seventeenth century Kirk Sessions.

Public repentance, barefooted and in sackcloth, was not heard of for the first time in Reformed Scotland. Tertullian, Ambrose, and Jerome were familiar with it. Gratian describes the penitents on Ash Wednesday presenting themselves at the church doors barefooted and in sackcloth. The Emperor Henry IV appeared at Canossa in penitent's garb. In 1535 a priest at Milan was obliged to do penance for months at the Cathedral door in sackcloth. In present-day England, Phillimore tells us, penance



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of this kind "still remains a legal though unusual ecclesiastical punishment," and in England examples can be cited not only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but up to 1849. In 1748 the *Gentleman's Magazine* describes two quakers doing penance "clothed in hair sackcloth." In 1790 a woman did penance at Wenlock clothed in a white sheet. And Public Penance is thus described by Chamberlayne in the various editions of his *Present State of Great Britain* (e.g., edit. of 1745) : "The delinquent is to stand in the church porch upon some Sunday, barehead and barefoot, in a white sheet and a white rod in his hand, there bewailing himself, and begging everyone that passes by to pray for him ; then to enter the church, falling down and kissing the ground, then in the middle of the church is he or she eminently placed in the sight of all the people and over against the minister, who declares the foulness of his crime, odious to God and scandalous to the congregation."

Sackcloth was much too scriptural a garb to be rejected at the Reformation, but its use was not invented by the Scottish Kirk Session. Lorimer seems to put the matter well when he says : "In judging of the Discipline of these days, it is no more than candid to bear in mind that the state of society was very rough and men felt public exposure less, that the civil and criminal laws were weak, and that the ecclesiastical was frequently the only one which could be enforced, that public opinion in the sense in which we understand the term was then almost unknown and hence the actual inflictions of Church courts needed to be the more severe."

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The elders were human beings, men of their time, and may sometimes have misjudged or erred in their sense of proportion or been carried away by zeal. They believed, however, that they had not only the authority but the responsibility in matters of life and morals, and their authority and responsibility were conceded by all and enforced by the State. They aimed at a condition of things that would not draw down the wrath of God upon the whole nation. Believing that the number of the elect was small they were not at all shy of noting the general corruption about them, and they were fearless in denouncing the scheduled faults and vices which were the evidence of Satanic activity in their midst. The sins of parishioners were known and public, plainly discussed and popularly judged. Everything was naked and open, and the Session had in those circumstances to vindicate the standard of the Church and to protect the faithful.

On the whole the system was popular. Anderson, writing in 1714, seems right in his view that "the Discipline is the more willingly submitted to by the people, being exercised by persons chosen from among themselves, appointed to represent them, to take care of their interests, and that they may have no reason to complain of the rigour or severity of the ministers. . . . Ruling elders are more conversant in the world, know better what the times will bear, and what allowances are necessary to be made in this or that case. Now when the people in the case of scandals see themselves judged by such persons, and that there is no other Discipline exercised on 'em but what even their own neigh-



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bours as well as their ministers think reasonable, they can have no just cause of complaint." Cases indeed are not unknown where congregations have made complaint when the Kirk Session did not seem sufficiently strict in discipline, as for example in 1644 in the parish of Craigie (Ayrshire) and in 1718 at Maybole.

It is also a mistake to imagine that the exercise of discipline in Scotland under Episcopacy was appreciably different from its exercise under Presbyterians. J. P. Lawson refers to "the inquisitorial power and tyranny of the Kirk Sessions, which candour obliges us to confess were not completely removed during the establishment of the Episcopate." This is a misrepresentation ; and anyone familiar with Presbytery and Session records will agree that, speaking generally, no difference is perceptible. The examples given in the succeeding pages will sufficiently substantiate this statement. It is true that there were periods of unusual strictness, as under the Protesters in the seventeenth century and the early Burghers and Antiburghers in the eighteenth. And one comes across particular parishes in all periods where the standard seems peculiarly rigid. One can also find volumes of minutes belonging to the second Episcopal period which contain few references to discipline, as for example those of Inverary and Dalmellington. But in attempting to generalise one can say little more than that ministers differed and local conditions varied while guiding principles remained the same. One must also realise that, while a percentage of ministers were ejected, and here and there a Session was dissolved, on the whole when Presby-

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terianism gave way to Episcopacy or Episcopacy to Presbyterianism the ministers and elders remained just the same. The Episcopalian author of the *Case of the Afflicted Clergy* (1690) says : "As to discipline its exactly in our Episcopal Church . . . according to the model of the Presbyterian mother kirk at Geneva."

In reading Session records at all periods one is frequently struck by the evidences of common sense, patience, affectionate interest and shrewd understanding on the part of elders. They knew the people intimately and were themselves intimately known. They recognised the hardened sinners ; and though they had no training in psychology and no legal education and often forgot the purpose of discipline, and were crude in their methods, charges were fairly tried without haste, and with a fair mingling of justice and mercy. In cases of difficulty there was reference to higher courts. A homely decision which reveals the personal touch is mentioned in Dr. Bentinck's *Dornoch*, where the Session dismiss a charge, "they being in perfect knowledge that the said John is a well-natured poor man, and if he was provoked to strike her, it was entirely owing to herself." A man was accused before Inverary Session in 1652 of being drunk and striking his wife, and it is recorded : "Though the Session know it from old experience, yet seeing they could not be provn, he was dismissed with a sharp rebuke." At Dalmellington in 1704 there is a case where "the Session having considered the depositions of the witnesses find nothing proven except that Christian called her a liar, which she manifestly appears to be by the



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former process, wherefor they absolved and dismiss the sd Christian." The Session had a fair amount of discretion and this was by no means always used to stiffen the exactions. There was a recognised leniency towards first offenders as to drink, profanity, Sabbath-breaking, etc. Further, it must be remembered that elders were pledged to secrecy, as by oath at Aberdeen in 1620. At Aberdour (Fife) in 1661, and at Oldhamstocks in 1675 the Sessions made special rules as to the punishment of an elder who divulges what passes in the Session.

To modern judgment it seems a real defect of the system that it confined attention to external offences, and that such deadly sins as pride and self-righteousness and hypocrisy escaped notice, but it has to be remembered that the Session was practically the police court of the day, dealing with classes of people who do not now come under Church influences, and working by legal procedure only. Even now we have scarcely devised any efficient machinery for dealing with the faults which our Master most severely censured.

Judged by our standards the Discipline appears often harsh and cruel. This is noticed specially in connection with sexual offences. Women seem to have suffered more than men. Public appearances must have been terrible for the more or less innocent and of little moment to the other type. And the court consisted only of men. Methods of enquiry seem to us unnecessarily merciless, as when at Oldhamstocks in 1699 the midwife was ordered to refuse assistance to a woman in childbirth till she declared the paternity of her child, or where

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no fewer than 248 females were personally examined by midwives in 1803 in the Grange area to discover the mother of a waif. Delation in some quarters appears to have become a fine art. In the first Episcopal period in 1603 at Aberdeen the Session appointed "several gentlemen" as "censurers and captors" to listen for bad language and fine each swearer, or if they had no money to give them "a straik on the hand with a palmer." In the days of the Protesters in 1652 we are told that the Kirk Session of Glasgow had "clandestine censors and gave money to some for this end." In the days of the second Episcopate in 1686 at Oldhamstocks we hear of 10/- given to a man "for taking ——— and ——— in bed together." On the other hand one finds not seldom such a note as occurs at Alvie (Inverness) in 1718: "To be very cautious anent delating persons and not bring in every trifling tale that is told in the country, founded very oft on ill-will."

Buckle refers to the Sessions as "arbitrary and irresponsible," but this is going much too far. One sometimes finds a Session which treats offences more severely than does some other Session, as might be the case to-day with judges and bailies. But the lines of treatment were laid down by General Assemblies and in many cases by Parliament. Sexual offences, profanation of Sabbath, abstention from church, blasphemy and bad language, drunkenness, gambling, attending lykewakes, going on pilgrimages, witchcraft, clandestine marriage, abuse of parents, child-murder, were all matters dealt with by the law of the land and remitted to Kirk Sessions in co-operation with the magistrates.



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The requirements of law express the higher level of contemporary public opinion, and we may take it that this Scottish code satisfied the mind of the times, and that Sessions as a whole were not making the law but putting it into execution.

In the seventeenth century, and especially about the middle of it, Church and State were indistinguishable in Scotland, comprising the same people with to a large extent the same leaders. To all intents and purposes everybody belonged to the one Church, whether Presbyterian or Episcopal at the moment, and responsible individuals might have difficulty in knowing (if they ever thought about it) whether on this or that occasion they were acting as magistrates or as elders. A good deal of disputation took place regarding Church and State. George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford wrote about it copiously and comprehensively and the Westminster Confession took the problem seriously ; but what was in mind was a limited question—the relation of the State as a whole to the Church as a whole. As far as local government—civil and ecclesiastical—was concerned there was no problem and therefore no theory. All agreed in opposing Erastianism, and on the other hand all agreed in hostility to Independency, which was introducing notions of Toleration and Liberty of Conscience that horrified the most ardent supporters of Spiritual Independence, who continued to demand State assistance to enforce their discipline. In the eighteenth century the Church had less control of the mind of the State and no longer spoke with unanimity. Constant civil support was no longer necessary, since much had passed

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over completely to the secular arm, and the Church could manage what was left, and was consequently free to develop new theories of Church and State and even of Voluntaryism.

Robert Baillie (*Historical Vindication*) has insisted that the Church in Scotland never "assumes the least degree of power to inflict the smallest civil penalty," and he goes on to say that fines, imprisonment, jogs, pillories and banishment are in the hands of the civil magistrate, and adds: "Ordinarily some of these civill persons are ruling elders and sit with the eldership. So when the eldership have cognosed upon the scandall alone of criminal persons and have used their spiritual censures only to bring the party to repentance, some of the ruling elders by virtue of their civil office or commission will impose a mulct or send to prison or stocks or banish out of the bounds."

But in fact things were not so carefully thought out in most parishes, and in the seventeenth century the functions of Church and State in the sphere of Discipline were often confused. What the Church wanted was penitence and the salvation of the sinner's soul, but there tended to be involved punishment and vengeance, and there was also the thought of public warning, and all this was very undetermined in the popular mind.

We frequently have cases passed on by Sessions to the magistrates. The *Order of Excommunication* in 1567 takes for granted the support of the civil powers. At Peebles in 1571 it is ordered that those who disobey the kirk shall be punished by the bailies, and at Grange in 1706 parties not comparing were referred to the magistrates as



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contumacious, while in 1711 the Presbytery of Deer wrote to Justices of the Peace "to oblige certain persons to compear before the Session." In 1644 we have a slander case at Yester referred to the laird ; in 1618 a burglar at Falkirk manse was sent to "my Lord's Court ;" and in 1660 at Ceres a complaint before the Session was found civil and criminal and a matter for a civil judge. A woman appeared before the congregation of South Leith in 1682 in sackcloth and was rebuked and referred to the King's Advocate. At Culross in 1651 the Sessions ordained two women to be banished from the town and recommended accordingly to the bailies ; and the Inveraray records have many similar entries. A woman at Aberdour (Aberdeenshire) in 1701 was warned that if she did not do what the Session ordered she would be sent to the magistrate to be scourged. The Session at Castleton (Roxburgh) in 1707 rebuked those concerned in a penny wedding and remitted them to the civil authority to be fined, and so in 1709 in connection with an irregular marriage. The *Form of Process* of 1707 instructs Sessions "to employ the aid of the civil magistrate, who ought to use his coercive power for the suppression of all such offences and vindicating the discipline of the Church from contempt." The Toleration Act of 1712 altered matters by forbidding magistrates to enforce Church censures or even summonses.

There are instances of the Session seeming to exercise directly the magisterial function. Thus the elders at St. Andrews in 1576 ordered sexual offenders to be imprisoned in the church steeple, and in 1581 they were investigating the sudden

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death of a child in bed. A Culross woman in 1648 was obliged by the Session to stand at the cross on the market day with a paper hat on her head stating her offence and then to be scourged by the hangman. In 1635 the Session at Falkirk condemned a woman to be banished or else scourged through the town, "or drowned as shall be thought most convenient." And at times Sessions exacted fines without any reference to the magistrates.

On the other hand we have the magistrates acting as if they were the Session. At Elgin in 1582 a woman was ordained by the Town Council to be imprisoned for twenty-four hours, and to appear on Sunday in Church on the stool of repentance; and in the same place in 1590 at a meeting of the elders, the minister not being present, the Provost took the chair and discipline was exercised. The Merchant Gild of Stirling in the early seventeenth century fined its members for Sabbath-breaking, keeping shops open in service-time, wearing blue bonnets in church, drinking on Sabbath, etc., and the magistrates of the same town in 1701 in their zeal to suppress immorality nominated people to delate offenders in various districts and to have a share of the fines. In 1663 the Aberdeen Council ordered three quakers out of the town and next year they issued instructions that young children were not to go to church till they could understand what was being said. At Dornoch we have a case of magistrates sending a victim to the Session with orders that "she shall be publicly rebuked from the pulpit next Lord's Day to deter others from the like practices in time coming."



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In the burghs magistrates and Session are regularly found working hand in hand. James VI made them jointly his justices in 1595 and country ministers were often justices of the peace. In 1603 Aberdeen magistrates and elders ordered a woman to be "doutit at the cran," and in 1612 they united to have certain offenders "apprehendit be the magistrat and put in prisoun till they satisfie at the appoyntment of the sessionne," while in 1647 the Council refers to the laudable acts of the Session in certain points and ratifies and approves them and decides upon fines "attour and but prejudice of what the Church may exact ; and in the same year there is the case of a woman convicted and condemned to the joughs and to be fined, but the Council annul their act on discovering that she had been sentenced by the Session to appear on the stool of repentance in Church. The Lesmahagow Kirk Session in 1697 recommends the Bailie "to cause fix a pair of joughs at the kirk door that he may cause punish corporally those who are not able to pay fynes," the offence under consideration at the moment being Sunday sheep-clipping.

So closely were the duties of magistrates and elders associated, that at Perth in 1616 it was agreed that the Provost and Bailies were always to be members of Session. It was the same at Glasgow. The Alyth Session in 1649 requires a bailie to concur with them and to impound the goods of swearers who will not obey the Church. At Logie near Stirling there was a recommendation in 1655 to have a civil session magistrate. An Act of the General Assembly in 1648 had suggested this and it became a fairly general practice. A

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Elgin in 1698 the Session requested that some of the magistrates should always sit in the Session and even in 1761 we hear of "the session Bailie." Dr. Bentinck reports a Dornoch case where the Session appointed a woman to stand before the congregation in sackcloth and "the Session bailie" thereupon ordered her to stand in the joggis. Dr. Edgar reports that most of the Ayrshire congregations had a Session Bailie.

Sometimes the relations between Council and Session were not so friendly. Where the Council maintained the church and paid the stipend it was occasionally difficult for them to recognise limits to their authority. In Aberdeen in 1655 the Session complained of Erastianism and "fearfull inroachments" by the Council upon the liberties of the Church. In the nineteenth century, too, there was trouble in defining responsibilities and we hear of strained relations, and by this time the Secessions had occurred, and Councillors might be ardent dissenters. After the union of 1707, too, the sphere of the civil authorities was gradually extended to cover a good many of the old Sessions' disciplinary functions, and the need for the Session bailie disappeared, while civil disabilities were soon to be dissociated from excommunication; but until 1929 there was a survival of the former close relations in connection with certain burgh churches, and in the right of burghs to representation in the General Assembly.

The effectiveness of Session Discipline has often been questioned. Sexual indulgence did not cease in Scotland as a result of it. Public exposure might act as a deterrent—though Church writers



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do not generally recognise this purpose. At the same time the frequency of the occurrence must have taken from its seriousness, and (like a modern police court conviction) the Discipline was perhaps more likely to make reformation difficult than to induce it. It also attracted sexual attention to the offenders. Burt, writing about 1730, says : "it serves for a direction where to find a loving girl upon occasion."

At certain periods and in certain districts there must nearly always have been someone on the stool of repentance. This could happen without any incredible amount of immorality in the parish, for a case of adultery for which complete satisfaction was offered might involve 26 appearances of each of the guilty parties, and for lesser offences six or three appearances of each would be usual, the man and woman being generally—though not everywhere—pilloried at different services. In a certain parish as late as 1738 on ten consecutive Sundays at one or both services there was always someone on the stool and altogether 17 appearances are recorded, but yet only four individuals were involved. On the other hand one can find cases, as at Banff in 1664 and again in 1692, when four persons were on the pillar at once. At Cullen on a certain Sunday in 1664 there were on the stool a woman (in sackcloth) making her fifth appearance, a woman (seventh), a man (fifth), a man and two women (fourth), two women (third), and a man making his first appearance, nine persons in all. At the same time it is easy to discover considerable periods in the eighteenth century and even earlier without any cases at all. The entry "no delations"

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is quite common. This in turn might be qualified by the case of Canisbay, where in 1652, when the elders intimated "no delations," the minister suggested that if they had been vigilant they might have found some.

Some delinquents took the matter lightly, or appeared to do so, and we have stories of the wearing of disguises, of the breaking of the stool, of impertinent remarks and of an air of bravado. Cases of misbehaviour on the stool are recorded at Perth in 1599 and Kirkcaldy in 1642.

The Church took the view that public appearances were a favour rather than an imposition. At Inveraray in 1655 certain delinquents are not permitted to make public appearance till they know the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Ten Commandments, others are found "stupid and ignorant" and insensible of their fault, and are sent to elders for private instruction before standing in church, and one man is admitted to public repentance for a day as a trial, and as a result of his behaviour is allowed to proceed with further public appearances. At Oldhamstocks in 1700 a woman under discipline was found by the minister "stupidly ignorant and scarce capable to learn," and she was obliged to stop public appearances till "some pains might be taken to instruct her." In 1737 at Yester a couple were ordered to "make no more appearance in public for their sin of adultery till it be seen and known how they behave for the future," and in the same parish in 1756 offenders appeared in the place of repentance and were told from the pulpit that they should not appear there again until they desired it as a favour and until they gave some evidence



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of the sincerity of their repentance by an amendment of life."

We have examples of the dread of public appearance. A man in Banff in 1691 when drunk declared that some of the elders helped themselves to the collections at the church door, and when questioned withdrew the charge. He pleaded not to be obliged to make a public appearance for slander and finally the Session admonished him on his knees before themselves, and made him help to mend "the cheeks of the door of the new church and harl the back wall of the church." In the parish of Yester there is a case in 1713 where a choice was offered of appearing before the congregation or giving a bond for £20 Scots not to repeat the offence and the delinquent chose to pay. There are also instances in most Session records of flight from discipline. In the seventeenth century these were marvellously unavailing; but by the eighteenth century the Church was losing control and more and more it became practicable to elude or decline discipline.

A common charge is that the fear of public appearances encouraged child murder. Arnot, in *Celebrated Criminal Trials*, says that "to avoid the disgrace of the repenting stool many a miserable wretch dared a guilt which was to be expiated by the pain and ignominy of the gallows." James Hall, in his *Travels*, published in 1807, makes the same suggestion and says: "The Scottish women are the greatest infanticides in the world." The poet Allan Ramsay also indicates that fear of the stool led to child murder, and Sir Walter Scott has made the same accusation. Somehow or other the charge

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is not substantiated by the statistics of the Privy Council Register; and one must suppose that the situation was not much different from what it is at present, when fear of public obloquy has a similar influence. Attention may also be drawn to the serious state of affairs in England as reflected by the *Guardian* of July 11th, 1713.

One of the commonest offences with which the Session was called upon to deal was profanation of the Sabbath. Parliament and Assembly were both zealous in combating this practice. An Act of James VI in 1579, for example, discharged markets and Sunday labour and games, drinking in service hours, and absence from church. In 1604 the Presbytery of Deer punished a man for working on the same day when he received Communion, and another for drunkenness at the Kirk of Crimond "in time of sermon." A Falkirk piper had to appear in sackcloth in 1623 for piping on Sunday. At Culross in 1632 we hear of buying and selling butter in time of sermon, and next year someone is charged with playing golf on Sunday, while two years later a man is delated because his house is "a common receptacle of drunkards in time of sermon," and another is charged with shooting doves. The Session at Yester in 1632 convicted several persons of "mucking the byre" on the Sabbath, and in 1647 the brewers and hostlers of the parish were brought before the Session and agreed not to sell drink during or after the services. At Rhynie (Aberdeenshire) in 1636 the Sabbath was profaned "by gathering grosers in tyme of sermon to make sale of them." A number of girls at Ceres were delated in 1649 for playing hide and



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refused, and then she went and took away a door as pledge *brevi manu* ; then Alister Roy's wife and daughter took hold of her and pulld and tore ye linnens off her head and gave her several scandalous names, upon qch Donald Ban came out and attacked the said Alister and had some blows with hands and feet *hinc inde*."

The Kirk Session at Urquhart (Elgin) had before it the common practice of gentlemen travelling on the Sunday. Bethelfield Associate Congregation, Kirkcaldy, in its early days, had to face the puzzling problem as to "whether the suffering of yarn to lie on the grass during Sabbath exposed to the influence of the heavens, while no servile work is done, or watching to prevent it being stolen, is a breach of the Fourth Commandment." It was ultimately decided that bleaching on Sabbath should be forborne, as it gave offence. The Associate Session in Aberdeen publicly rebuked a woman in 1764 for selling bread on Sunday. Several charges of Sabbath breaking occur at this period also at Dalmellington.

By the close of the century the situation was somewhat modified and the Act of Assembly of 1794, while reprinting various Acts of Parliament on the subject, advises Presbyteries to deal "in such a prudent manner as shall seem best calculated for checking the further profanation of the Holy Sabbath," but confines prosecutions "to those cases which shall be judged to be proper subjects of prosecution by the several Presbyteries," and forbade Sessions to try cases of themselves. A special Committee reported on similar lines in 1823.

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Breaking the Lord's Day included absence from church. This was a crime according to the law of the land from Reformation days as earlier. At Elgin in 1601 a large batch of parishioners were fined on one occasion for absence from church, and in 1648 we have six persons making public appearance for absence "standing up in their seats," and next year the names of absentees were being reported to the Session. The Session of Ceres at the same period was dealing with "ordinar byding from the kirk on the Sabbath day." A Culross man was charged in 1650 with "sitting in his own house the whole tym" of public worship. He confessed on his knees before the Session and was told he would make public satisfaction if it occurred again. At Alves in 1672 the elders decided that the habitual absentees would be best discovered if the roll were occasionally called, and it was arranged that suspected absentees should be "called by their names betwixt the psalm and the blessing." A woman at Anstruther Easter in 1698 expressed her hearty sorrow for staying at home from church and promised not to do so again; and at Inveraray in 1705 some children were in trouble for rowing up and down in a boat during service hours. In 1761 the Associate Session in Aberdeen admonished a man "for walking in the fields in time of divine worship," declaring it no excuse that he was feeling ill.

The whole Sunday had to be strictly kept, and the religious observances in church and at home were calculated to occupy most of the day. Elders were regularly employed as "searchers" to see that the law was obeyed. A common entry is as



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at Ceres in 1657 : "The searchers went through the town." The Turriff elders (Aberdeenshire) were ordered in 1642 to go through the town in time of divine service to observe the keeping of the Lord's Day. At Yester in 1649 the elders of the different quarters were to note and delate who are absent from Church. A Culross woman in 1649 was charged with "railing on the searchers." An elder and a deacon in Yester parish in 1654 had to stand at a certain point to watch who go away from church without waiting for the afternoon service, and elders went round the parish after the services "to see what the people are doing," and prevent servants visiting friends. In 1655 a Ceres elder found people in a house during afternoon service, but they hid in the bakehouse and he could not get a candle to see who they were. The elders in Culross in 1657 visited their quarters after the services "that people may not sitt at doors or without doors craking their ordinarie discourse." In the same parish in 1676 "the searchers declared that they found Christian Makfarlan cutting caill in tyme of divyne service," and in 1681 the Session had to make a rule that people were not to keep their doors shut when the searchers "come to see who is at home in tyme of divine service." The Inveraray elders do not seem to have been very enthusiastic "searchers," for the rule about going through the town to see who are absent from church or who are in the streets or woods unnecessarily had to be renewed in 1661, 1678, 1679 and 1681, and again in 1700 and 1711. At Oldhamstocks in 1706 an elder searching for "unnecessary withdrawers from ye ordinances" surprised a man

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with his arms about a woman's neck. In 1727 and again in 1755 the Falkirk elders were taking note of those who walked about in service time or wandered in the streets or fields afterwards, or engaged in drinking.

The searchers had also to go to markets, as at Anstruther Easter in 1654, etc., and Inverness as late as 1720, to keep a check on swearing. At Elgin in 1649 the elders were instructed to admonish swearers and if they do not amend at the third warning, to delate them. The private warning of offenders was encouraged at Ceres, for example in 1660, delation being reserved for those who did not respond to private dealing. The searchers sometimes (as at Falkirk in 1652) went round the town at ten o'clock every night, or (as at Inveraray in 1711) on Saturday night, to see who were drinking late, or (as at Dalmellington in 1710) on the weekly market night. The Session at Lauder (Berwick) in 1677 decreed that no one was to drink after ten o'clock at night "whether drunk or not."

Behaviour in church came under the care of the Session. In 1656 a Falkirk man confessed to knocking off another's bonnet in church. At Culross in 1657 an elder was appointed "to sitt in the quier to still the children that maks dinne in tyme of dyvine service." Some young lads in Ceres were reported in 1658 to play and fight in a certain loft during the service, and one of the elders was put in charge of the key. The Alves Session in 1659, "considering that those who sitt in the loft in the west end of the church are negligent in hearing the word and take delight in conferences in tyme of sermon therefore that the elders per vices



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should sitt there." At Grange in 1700 there is complaint about spitting from the loft on the people below. Sleeping in church was common, and in 1616 the Session Officer at Perth was ordered to have his "red staff" at hand to waken sleepers. Incidentally he was also to remove "greeting bairns" from the church. The Kinghorn Session in 1642 forbade women to wear plaids as they were "a means to provoke sleep," and in 1651 and 1656 the Inveraray Session for the same reason orders plaids to be laid down on the shoulders, objecting that otherwise those who sleep cannot be distinguished from others and so cannot be wakened. Seats in church were a frequent source of trouble. Thus in 1711 two women at Falkirk made public repentance for "stryving together about a chair in the church."

The Sessions were as particular about attendance at services on Fast Days, and at certain periods Family Worship was strictly insisted upon. At Fenwick in 1694 it is stated that Fasts and Thanksgivings had been laxly observed in "the late Episcopal times." In 1596 the General Assembly was condemning the neglect of Family Worship, and numerous later Acts refer to it. The Puritans from 1638 were emphatic about its importance, and in 1694, 1697, 1711, the Assembly passed strong recommendations that it should be everywhere observed. A long pastoral letter on the same subject was published by the Assembly of 1836. Elders in particular were required to be careful about Family Worship, and according to the Act of 1694, confirmed in 1722, no one was to be elected to the office who neglected this practice.

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The elders of Essil in 1647 all gave assurance that they observed it, and at Alves some are in trouble in 1664 for not having it. The Session in this latter parish had been investigating in their districts in 1659 how far people held family exercises. At Ceres in 1660 a man is forbidden to conduct the worship in his home because of "un-christian carriage," and another member of the family is entrusted with the duty. In 1683 the Session at Yester issues an exhortation upon the subject.

References to witchcraft, charming and cursing are common in records all over the country. Calderwood reports the delation of four women for witchcraft in 1563, and the Assembly of 1573 made strict rules regarding those who consulted witches.

The Session at Deer was ordained by the Presbytery in 1606 to "proceed in taking ane inquest and tryell of wiches" according to the Act of the Synod. At Yester in 1629 the Session decides to hand over to the civil authorities those "persevering in the divell's art." A Perth woman guilty of consulting a witch in 1623 had to "stand in white sheets under the bell string" as the congregation assembled. Kirkcaldy Session in 1633 has to pay for someone who went to fetch "the man that tries the witches." The Kirk Session of Elgin in 1597 heard a charge against a woman of assuming the form of a bee, and at Alves in 1653 a man accused another of injuring his salmon-fishing in the form of a crow. There was a sorcerer in Grange parish in the middle of the seventeenth century who for a price would give substance to a corn crop and who if thwarted could cause poltergeist trouble. In



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1659 a witch at Fetteresso made a woman almost distracted through "a piece of fish raune" which she handed to her.

Both civil and ecclesiastical authorities were much exercised over such matters during a long period. Acts of Assembly in 1640, 1642, 1643, 1649, dealt with the crime. The Episcopal Synod of Aberdeen in 1669 made an act against witches and charmers "so much abounding in all parts of this countrie." The Archbishop of St. Andrews was also kept busy with the delation of witches in Fife. Steuart of Pardovan's very interesting chapter on Witches and Charmers shows how serious was the general belief in witchcraft at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and we must remember the complaint in the Judicial Testimony of the first Seceders that the Church of Scotland had erred gravely in permitting the repeal of the laws against witchcraft in 1736. The last recorded case of the burning of a witch in Scotland was at Dornoch in 1722.

At Ceres in 1649 a woman was in trouble for calling another a "witchbird," and in 1660 a woman is charged with cursing a cow when it ran through her corn. Seafaring people being specially superstitious there are numerous cases in the Kirkcaldy records between 1614 and 1690 of curses which were declared to have had dreadful results. In 1651 a woman at Speymouth went down on her knees and cursed her neighbour in these words: "Let never himself, wife, bairns or family thrive or forwards go and let never horse, oxen, kye or anything that belongs to him luck nor stand." At Alves in 1658 a woman was

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charged with praying : " I ask at God and our dear Lady that the next child ——— shall bear to her husband may be like a wedder," and adding that she never asked anything from God without obtaining it. In 1685 a Ceres woman said she hoped the husband of another would go mad and that hell would be his parish church and the devil his minister. No discipline, however, seems to have been suggested in the case of the Antiburgher minister of Earlston (Berwick), in the middle of the eighteenth century, who denounced in church two men who refused the eldership, and declared " the wind will blow in your faces all your days " —after which according to local tradition they never prospered.

We come across survivals of ancient charms and means of divination. "Turning the riddle with the shears" is recorded by the Session at Perth in 1589, at Deer in Aberdeenshire in 1654, at Aberdour in Fife in 1669, at Minnigaff in Kirkcudbright in 1702, at Croy in Inverness-shire before 1720. The superstition of the unploughed " Guidman's Croft " was difficult to extirpate in the north-east. A charmer before Turriff Presbytery in 1650 had laid his hand on a person's shoulder and said : " I charm thee for the head fevers, the heart fevers, the liver fevers, the neare fevers, the lung fevers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." Before the Presbytery of Deer in 1659 a man confessed that " he had behead a beast and buried the body in one heritor's land and the head in another," as he had seen done " for curing of sudden diseases among cattle." At Auchtermuchty (Fife) in 1711 a woman was punished for



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taking a child in her arms and carrying it round an oak post, saying : "Oaken post, stand thou, bairn's maw turn thou, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." In the Presbytery of Turriff in 1650 there was a case where a couple were forced to remove by the owner of the land. They drowned out the fire with a mess including rotten eggs, took out the hearthstone and broke it and put the pieces in a certain posture in divers parts of the house whispering certain words. The Presbytery of Garioch in 1703 records that if a man designed ill to his successor in a house he would hang a dog in it or bury a cat under the hearth or take out "ye crook at ye lumb," or extinguish the fire with urine.

Pilgrimages to Holy Wells and Chapels were common in many parts of the country in the seventeenth century. Examples of favourite resorts are the Chapel of Seggat, our Lady's well at Drumblade, "the Chapel beyond the Water of Spey," the well at Airth, Christ's well at Falkirk. Superstitious observance of Yule and other festivals was also a cause of complaint.

A fault often brought to the notice of Kirk Sessions as much in the eighteenth as in the seventeenth century was drunkenness, and frequently flyting and scolding, quarrelling and fighting; blasphemy and profanity were associated with it, and had to be severely handled by both Church and State.

Cases of slander also came before the Session, and likewise assaults by tongue or fist. Connection with penny weddings called for action on the part of many Sessions, as did promiscuous dancing. At

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Ashkirk (Selkirk) in 1638 a piper had to stand in sackcloth for piping at bridals. If too many people were present at a marriage the "consignment" money might be confiscated, as at Fenwick (Ayrshire) in 1694, and Kelso in 1710. In cases where marriage did not follow proclamation the pledge was likewise confiscated. At Grange in 1685 a man was rebuked before the Session for kissing his bride in church. An offence of which we hear a great deal in the eighteenth century is irregular marriage.

Political offences sometimes called for notice, and excommunication was commoner for these than for any other type of fault. Some Kirkcaldy men who had joined Montrose had to appear before the congregation at Kirkcaldy in 1644 and in the following year there was threat of excommunicating quite a number of deserters from the army of the Covenant. At Aberdour in Fife a man is ordained by the Presbytery "to stand at the kirk door in sackcloth between the first and third bells for four several Sabbaths" for accepting the Engagement of 1648. In 1647 there compeared before the Presbytery of Turriff a "malignant" in sackcloth upon his knees confessing his fault in going with the Marquis of Huntly. The Yester elders in 1648 were searching out those who had not subscribed the Solemn League and Covenant. In the same parish in 1679 several persons were re-proved for attending a conventicle, and a man at Lauder had to give satisfaction for having been "in rebellion at Bothwell Bridge." A Galston member in 1693 appeared before the Session to express the sense he had of the sin of having sub-



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scribed the Test of 1681. At Airlie in 1746 four men were rebuked before the congregation for implication in "the late wicked rebellion."

Sometimes very trivial charges appear in the records, as where in Yester in 1623 a man paid a penalty for bringing a dog to church, or where at Canisbay in 1654 people who laughed at others singing the psalms are to "stand in sackcloth and pay what ye Session sall be pleased to inflict." Some curious offences and punishments may be noted. The Dunfermline Session in 1655 demanded satisfaction of one who had been "hoking up a groser busse on the Sabbath." Playing golf on Sunday occurs frequently, as at Kirkcaldy in 1633. In that same town in 1628 a man was before the Session for having been very sick in church, another in 1625 for abusing his mother and biting her nose—which he promised never to do again, and a woman in 1615 was put in the "joggs" and made public repentance "for wanting to hang herself." At Cullen in 1657 a man who delivered some fish to a house on Sunday was ordained "to satisfy as a fornicator," and at Minnigaff (Kirkcudbright) in 1695 people who drove goods on Sunday were likewise "censured as fornicators."

Overseriousness also had its victims in the eighteenth century. Two young men belonging to Hawick had to go down on their knees before the Session in 1713 for "breach of Sabbath by rideing upon stilts, thereby causing crowds of bairns to follow them." Somerville reports how a friend of his was summoned before an Antiburgher Kirk Session in 1754 for hearing a Church of Scotland minister, and many similar cases are on record.

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A member of the Associate Church of Aberdeen was rebuked in 1762 for going to hear the Methodists. In the Antiburgher congregation at Gateshaw in the Border district most of the accusations before the Session were for hearing Burgher ministers.

During the seventeenth century the Session met every week or every fortnight for Discipline. In the next century Session meetings became gradually much fewer. After prayer there were delations by elders or "bills" of complaint were handed in by members of the congregation, and all the disciplinary part of the business was executed in the strictest legal form. In the case of delations by private individuals, Dalmellington Session in 1702 demanded a pledge of 40 shillings, which was confiscated if the charge was unproven. The elders were specially responsible for their own districts, for every parish was divided into "quarters" or "precincts," according to old practice as in France in 1565, and according to a Scottish Act of 1646. The Secession Churches followed the same practice, although they did not recognise the old parochial divisions.

Sessions were in the habit of giving certificates when desired to the effect that satisfaction had been offered for some fault. Such a testimonial was handed in at Anstruther Easter in 1658 and at Oxnam in 1700. Testimonials to those removing from Yester in 1647 bore whether or not they had been before the Session. In 1667 at Oldhamstocks an oath of purgation was taken and a certificate to that effect given. The Presbytery of Deer in 1710 found a woman innocent of a charge and agreed



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to give her an extract minute to that effect. In 1730 the Session of Culross gave a certificate to a man that his ear had been eaten off by a horse and not cut off for any crime. Gateshaw Antiburgher Session in 1775 was asked for a certificate, and what they gave was in these words : " These certify that ——— removed out of this congregation upwards of four years ago, under the scandal of defrauding several of his creditors without ever to this day giving any satisfaction to them or to this congregation."

Persons of rank were not exempt from Discipline. Allan Ramsay hinted that gentlemen's sins were easily atoned by a money payment, and no doubt in this sphere as in others there was in fact often one law for the rich and another for the poor. Glasgow Session in 1608 excused with a reprimand a laird and former provost " considering his age and the station he held in the town ;" and at Cullen in 1664 there are two cases of scolding, the delinquents in the one case being sentenced to sack-cloth and jouns, while the others being burgesses' wives were merely rebuked before the Session and fined a dollar. On the other hand class entered into consideration less than might have been expected, partly because of the strong biblical teaching as to equality before God and the presence on the Session of representatives of every class. The Session formed at Inveraray in 1650 included the Marquis of Argyll, his heir (Lord Lorne), the Sheriff, the Marquis's master of the household, the Provost of the town, and four entirely ordinary citizens. Dr. Edgar quotes a case from Ayrshire, where in 1643 the laird compeared " in the habite

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of sackcloth," and on his knees before the Presbytery and later before the congregation confessed a serious moral offence. Even in 1710 the Provost of Banff "made his appearance publicly, was exhorted and absolved," and in 1715 at Grange the laird was rebuked in face of the Session, and this intimated to the congregation, his delinquency being that he had his horse shod on the Lord's Day. The Ballingry records (Fife) show heritors under discipline in 1677, 1738 and 1802. The General Assembly in 1573 had given orders that "greit men offending in sic crymes as deserves sackcloath should receive the samen as well as the puire," and the alternative payment of money was forbidden.

Elders themselves were by no means free from Discipline. There were the Privy Censures, which were regularly held in the earlier days, and which we note at Inveraray in 1706, and in the Associate Church at Aberdeen in 1772. There was also the Presbytery visitation, when the activities and character of the elders were investigated. Apart from these occasions offending elders were severely handled by their colleagues. At Elgin in 1604 certain elders were dealt with for playing golf on a Sunday. In 1652 it was resolved that any elder of Grange parish who swore should pay a fine, and for a third offence be suspended. In 1656 one of the elders there was deposed for cursing on the Lord's Day. A Falkirk elder in 1650 was fined for not doing his duty in taking note of swearing and drunkenness in the market. The Ceres Session in 1658 had to rebuke one of their number for drunkenness and quarrelling. At



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Alves in 1633 an elder was deposed for "resorting to ane browster house" on the Lord's Day and "most irreligiouslie and unciville contending and tulzieing in it" and menacing someone with a drawn dirk. A Kirkcaldy elder was rebuked in 1666 for sawing wood to make a coffin on a Sunday. In 1722 Oldhamstocks had a member of the Session deposed for bad character, and in 1714 Inveraray had much trouble about one of the Session who had been provost and also about his wife. An elder of Jedburgh Burgher Congregation (Blackfriars) was disciplined in 1764 for giving a token contrary to the decision of the Session. After the restoration of Presbyterianism an elder at Inverness in 1691 was sharply reprimanded and suspended for two years for being married by a Bishop.

The minister's wife at Kennethmont (Aberdeenshire) in 1664 had been responsible for some of the corn on the glebe being "led" on Sunday. The Session ordained her to "mak publick professione of repentance for the same upon a Lord's day befor the pulpit, upon a seat put their for that effect," a neighbouring minister to preach and receive her to repentance and absolve her.

Even the minister might be disciplined, though the *Form of Process* of 1707 states that the minister is not liable to the censure of the Session, but only to that of higher courts. At Stow Burgher Congregation in 1804 the minister had been stirred to call his Session "a Korah-like company," whereupon the Session had a neighbouring minister called in to preach and the minister was afterwards publicly rebuked. In the earlier days the minister was more definitely under the Session's instructions.

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The Session regulated the "ordinary." On one occasion we find the Canongate Session asking the minister to take up the Book of Acts, while St. Andrews Session prescribed II Samuel, and in 1620 the Aberdeen Session appointed Dr. William Forbes to teach Romans. About the same date we have Elgin Session recommending the minister to preach shorter sermons; and in 1601 in the same parish the minister had it minuted that no member of Session could find fault with his doctrine on the previous Sunday. It was customary for the Session to keep a record of texts employed. At the Presbyterial visitations the Session had full opportunities of criticising the minister.

It seems to have been fairly common to have meetings of the elders both for discipline and for distribution of poor money in the unavoidable absence of the minister—for example, at Elgin before 1630. In this parish in 1597 "the haill elderis has electit nominat and chosen Alexander Annand, bailie, to be thair moderator of this assemblie quhill the ministeris hame cumming." Wodrow mentions cases at Ayr in the early seventeenth century, when elders acted as moderators in Session when the minister was away. But generally matters are postponed till an "actual" minister is available to preside according to the law of the Church.

Eighteenth century records seldom include discipline cases except such as involved sexual offences or profanation of the Sabbath. Allan Ramsay indicates that only the continuance of the former gave the elders anything to "jot into their journal." There was also a general relaxation of treatment and in the second half of the century public appear-



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ances grew rare. Already so early as 1704 there is a case at Inveraray, where the Session, anxious to deal with things "in the way that might be most conducive to the glory of God and to the gaining of offenders and removing of the offence," decided against public appearance. At Alyth in 1761 the Session ordained "that such as decline going to the ordinary place of repentance shall pay twelve lib. of penalty." At Cullen in 1751 a man escaped with one appearance on paying double penalty, "the Session considering that the additional money might be of more use to the poor than his further appearances might be for edification to the congregation." And the report from Carluke in the *Old Statistical Account* towards the close of the century states that discipline there is always exercised with mildness, only one appearance being generally required, and in certain cases only a sessional rebuke, "so that none are hardened by frequent appearances."

In the parish of Yester we have merely "rebuked and dismissed" in 1770 and succeeding years, but occasional public appearances at the request of the guilty parties. Here in 1784 a man at his own desire made public satisfaction for an offence committed in 1770. In 1791 three women at their own desire appeared before the congregation and were absolved. Public appearances rapidly diminished at Cullen and at Banff after 1765. At Daviot in Aberdeenshire in 1778 public appearances are made, but in that year we have an entry that the Session, "considering several circumstances in his case, agreed he should be rebuked in their presence," and in 1782 an adulterer, "being seriously dealt with was dismissed," making a payment to the poor.

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Thereafter this is the rule. The entry about 1800 is "dealt with and exhorted to repentance, absolved from the scandal, having paid the penalty." Dr. James Campbell reports that about 1780 sessional rebuke was substituted for public appearance in Balmerino parish. At Oldhamstocks there are public appearances till 1791, after which the record usually runs : "Got a rebuke before the Session and was fined 5/- for her conduct," the fine in the case of a man being £1 1s. od. At Farnell (Angus) the elders in 1787 decided that "a sessional rebuke would serve more for the interest of religion than his being rebuked publicly." The sackcloth was in use at Grange in 1750. A new sackcloth gown was provided at Morebattle in 1731. At Alves "only some raggs of the sackcloth" remained in 1737, and it was on this ground dispensed with in a certain case. A delinquent came before Blackfriars Burgher congregation in Jedburgh as late as about 1763 "clothed in sackcloth." The last case "in sacco" before the Presbytery of Ellon was in 1781, but there had been few in the preceding quarter of a century.

Apart from the changed relations of Church and State, and the taking over of certain types of cases by the civil authorities, one cause of the apparent slackening of discipline in the eighteenth century was that the Session had begun to lose its authority over the whole parish, especially when Secession had become a possibility. The most careless section of the populace dared to refuse discipline or slipped through between the various Kirk Sessions. Discipline could now in fact be avoided. The phenomenon had occurred earlier, for in Alyth



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in 1656 a man who had been in a good deal of trouble fell away to Popery. The General Assembly of 1704 noted that "some persons when challenged for scandal do turn Popish or pretend to do so to avoid censure." In 1720 a woman under discipline at Bellie escaped by joining "the illegal English service meeting in Gordon Castle." Yester Session in 1731 complained that a woman had had an illegitimate child baptised by an Episcopal minister in Fife. The Associate Synod meeting in Edinburgh in 1758 discussed the problem that persons charged with offences "do in order to escape censure withdraw from us." At Oldmachar, Aberdeen, in 1844, a woman "declared that she is not a member of the Established Church and not a fit object of discipline," and next year there was the case of a man who "being an Episcopalian it was thought unnecessary to summon him." The United Presbyterian Church at Savoch in 1849 was careful to state that in the case of "a fugitive from discipline" from the Free Church applying to them for admission, "they so far respect that discipline that they would decline the application." It is obvious that Sessions were reduced to dealing only with such as cared to submit to them. Very many instances might be cited where charges had simply to be abandoned through the failure of Sessions to enforce their authority. An amusing case occurred at Fetteresso (Kincardine) in 1748, where a man threatened with excommunication simply replied "What care I! The Pope of Rome excommunicates you every year, and what the waur are ye o that?"

In the sixteenth century social conditions were

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exceedingly rude, and the Session's police activities brought them into contact with all that was lowest in society, and with much brutal and bestial conduct, so that records such as those of St. Andrews and Perth, which are amongst the fullest which survive for that period are not pleasant to read, but there is a certain childishness about such a satisfaction as this in the former parish in 1579: "To kneel before the congregation and confess his sin and hold his tongue in his hand and say, False tongue, thou lied, and then stand every Sunday at the church door from the 2nd to the 3rd bell, barefooted and bareheaded with face uncovered, and then on the penitent stool, and also to attend church every preaching day in the week and sit under the pulpit during the sermon."

The forms of satisfaction gradually became less primitive. Minor offences were dealt with by private rebuke or rebuke before the Session, more serious delinquencies by rebuke in church standing in their own seat, or on a special seat below the pulpit, or on a pillory, while the most serious cases involved sackcloth. The number of appearances which Sessions required varied a good deal from place to place. The lesser excommunication which involved simply exclusion from the Lord's Supper, was used for the contumacious in the eighteenth century. The greater excommunication was rare and could not be inflicted by mere sessional decision. Absolution was private or public, according as the appearance had been private or public.

Some examples will illustrate these points. At Elgin in 1601 the Master of the Grammar School had to stand up in his seat and apologise for having



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a play of Terence acted by the scholars. Robert Burns mentions in a letter that as a concession he was allowed to make his repentance standing in his own seat. Someone had to appear in the Kirk of Deer in 1610 and make public repentance on his knees before the pulpit in his own clothes. There was often a repentance form below the precentor's desk as there is still at the church of Dyke, and as in Kilrenny before the recent renovations. At Inveraray delinquents in 1651 testified their repentance "upon a furme befor the pulpit," but there was also the "pillar" in this church as a minute of that same date reveals. Entries at Ceres in 1667 are either "compeared before the pulpit" or "appeared upon the pillar." The Perth stool of repentance had "certain degrees, that therein offenders may be distinguished and better discerned by their place and habit." At St. Andrews we hear in 1575 of "the uppermost penitent stool." The stool at Alyth in 1663 was on the south side of the north-west pillar of the church, and there is a reference to its stanchions and iron-work and to the "ladder whereby they went up to the stool of repentance." Monkton Church (Ayrshire) had its pillar above one of the doors at the same height as the loft. The Episcopalian Session of Banff in 1664 found that "the pillar and persons therein standing is not conspicuous enough," and it was referred to the treasurer to have it heightened. The Presbyterian minister at Falkirk in 1696 complained that the "pillar" was too far from the pulpit and too much in the dark and the Session decided to have a form made and placed before the pulpit for the scandalous. At

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Logie near Stirling we hear in 1704 of "four dealls to be a repentance stool," and also of expense for "an spar thereto," and nails and making and colouring ; also in 1707 we find a charge "for lettering of the black stool." In 1732 at Alves "the black chair being broken it is appointed that fornicators as well as adulterers stand at the west pillar foot ;" but this caused a strike, and the Session were informed that "the fornicators refused to stand at the same pillar with the adulterers," so they were assigned a place "at the pillar opposite to the pulpit." A Boyndie delinquent in 1734 "swore by a great oath that if he was not allowed to compear but for one Lord's Day and that in the Fishers' Loft and then be absolved upon his paying a guinea, he should wind the Session an ill pirn." Sometimes one appearance was indeed all that was required by certain Sessions, but at Peebles, under the second Episcopate in 1666, there is a case of a woman who had "stood in the habit of an adulteress for twelve months," after which "she compeared in sackcloth and confessing her sin with tears was appointed to be received." Occasionally the sentence was indefinite, as at Inveraray in 1655, where a man had to appear from Sabbath to Sabbath until he acknowledge he has sinned against God and wronged his neighbour.

At Banff in 1663 sackcloth was required in a case of fornication as it was a "quadrulapse." The Inveraray Session, however, seems to have had no sackcloth at all until in 1703 there occurred a very aggravated case of immorality on the part of the schoolmaster, which induced the Session to "cause make a sackcloth for delinquents." Even



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then it was not used as the guilty man eventually fled to Ireland, apparently abandoning his "goods and gear." The most serious sinners had to stand outside the church in sackcloth, barefoot and bare headed and then appear on the repentance stool, and be rebuked at the close of the service, as for example in a case of adultery at Falkirk in 1619. In 1673 a sentence at Banff reads: "With open voice befor the whole congregation acknowledge ther offensive behaviour." The "lesser excommunication" was pronounced at Morebattle in 1730 for contumacy according to the *Form of Process* of 1707.

One seldom comes across cases of the greater excommunication, save in days of political excitement, and they are matters of long process and the sentences obviously pronounced with extreme reluctance. Robert Baillie (*Review of Bramhall's Faire Warning*) tells us that excommunication was so rare that an individual might never in all his life hear that sentence pronounced. He himself in forty-seven years, many of them spent in Glasgow, only remembered two occasions of it, one a case of popery, and the other that of "some horrible scandalous prelates." This is the sort of fact which Buckle and his kind so completely overlooked, with the result that they give a very unfair picture.

Cases of course did occur, chiefly on grounds of contumacy. An "infamous strumpet" was excommunicated at Banff in 1684. In such cases the penalty was serious enough, as we can see from an entry at Inveraray in 1655, where a man was forbidden to have his excommunicated daughter in his house, and there are instances of persons

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in trouble for having spoken to excommunicated persons. Sentences of excommunication were always widely intimated throughout the district, and sometimes throughout the whole Church.

Sessions were not responsible for the terms in which delinquents might be publicly rebuked by the minister and one can understand that there was much variety here, in different places and periods. Some rebukes were merely formal, others would be heartlessly terrifying, others again affectionately reformatory. Complaint was made to the Presbytery of Strathbogie in 1631 that the minister of Gartly 'taxed the faults of the parishioners bitterly, and not in the language of Scripture, whereby the people, instead of being edified, were moved to laughter and derision.' Burns, the poet, refers in a letter to delinquents being "made a Sunday's laughing-stock and abused like a pick-pocket." The rebuke was sometimes termed "the wee sermon."



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EDUCATION in Pre-Reformation days had been almost completely left in the hands of the Church and the Church's sense of responsibility in the matter was not lessened at the Reformation. The *First Book of Discipline* outlined an ambitious scheme of general education from primary school to university, but the Church found itself without the financial resources to make, even indirectly, any such provision. Like the supply of religious ordinances through stipend and church buildings and of all other welfare influences, the burden of financing education was naturally assignable to the heritors in country districts and to town council in burghs ; and the General Assembly did its best to bring home to all parties their duty. In burgh things went pretty well, but the attitude of heritors was as a rule to do, not what they might, but what they must, and Scottish education—particularly elementary education—was consequently very inadequate, at least until the later eighteenth century by which time the legal provision had been largely augmented by voluntary effort.

The education problem was constantly before the Church. Thus in 1562 the Assembly petitioned the Queen with regard to maintenance of schools

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From ecclesiastical sources at her disposal. And where schools were established, the Church was earnest in the work of supervision. The Assembly of 1595 ordained that Presbyteries take order for visitation and reformation of grammar schools within their bounds, and see that teachers were properly paid, and that town councils assisted the masters in discipline. The Privy Council in 1616 was persuaded to give orders that a school should be set up "in every parish of this kingdom where convenient means may be had." Church and State united at various dates—notably 1633, 1646 and 1696—in attempting to regularise and improve the provision of educational facilities.

The burghs as a whole were fortunate, town councils in many cases working intelligently with the local sessions to encourage education, and particularly religious education, though occasional jealousies appeared and councils such as those of Perth and Elgin made a determined struggle for independence of Church influence. Some of the early schools were very good. Patrick Forbes, born 1564, afterwards Bishop of Aberdeen, was sent from the north to be schooled at Stirling. And pre-Reformation grammar schools at Glasgow, Aberdeen, and elsewhere, became famous institutions.

Both in town and country progressive men of means left money for educational purposes. Schools such as George Heriot's in Edinburgh in the seventeenth century and Robert Gordon's in Aberdeen in the eighteenth, are examples of how this was done on a large scale, but a multitude of Scottish parishes had the benefit of local mort-



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fications which sometimes made all the difference. At Dunbar, Haddington, Inverkeithing and many other centres, the reader from the Reformation days acted as teacher, though without a school and no doubt practically without emolument beyond the trifling fees. The first Episcopate, by its encouragement of the institution of reader in addition to minister, helped somewhat to encourage schooling.

But many parishes were destitute of all provision for a long period. In his *Theologia Moralis*, John Forbes of Corse, referring to the first third of the seventeenth century, complains about the wretchedness of education in the Scottish Highlands, and mentions how ministers have the expense and inconvenience of sending off their sons to schools in some distant town. Heritors in general did not feel strongly about the question, for they normally had someone employed about the estate as secretary, factor and chaplain who could undertake the tuition of the children of the household. There was also a lingering suspicion that learning was merely wasted upon the people. A special enquiry into the state of representative parishes in 1627 brings out the fact that most had no school—for example, Weem (Perthshire), Nesting (Shetland), Coldstream (Berwick), Currie (Midlothian). Moradinton (Berwick) reports that “there is a great necessity of a school for not one of the parish can read nor write except the minister.” In 1644 the Session of Oldhamstocks (East Lothian) was vainly approaching the heritors “anent a schoolmaster.” In the Presbytery of Brechin, in 1650 not a third of the parishes had schools and even

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these were not fully provided. Alvah in 1657 had "no school at present." At Kilmacolm the heritors agreed to a school in 1659, but it was not provided till 1666 and thereafter very parsimoniously maintained. Ballingry (Fife) had no schoolmaster in the parish till 1669, and no school building till 1722. The church at Auchterderran (Fife) was used as a school till 1668, when the minister gave a present of some stones and lime and the Session gave the schoolmaster a few dollars from the forfeited pledges and allowed him to cut what wood was needed for building and roofing the house. An aisle of the Laigh Kirk at Kilmarnock was used for teaching the scholars till at least 1695. The school at Kilchoman (Argyll) was still taught in the church when the *Old Statistical Account* of the parish was written. Rathven (Banffshire) had no school till 1726, nor Blantyre (Lanarkshire) till 1731. Lethnot (Angus) had no schoolmaster in 1658, "which was regretted by the elders thereof who shew themselves desirous to have one" and in 1727 it could still be stated that there had "never been any schoolmaster or Session clerk in the parish."

It is obvious that Kirkton's vivid imagination was working more vividly than usual when he asserted that before the Restoration "every village had a school." The S.P.C.K. (founded in 1709) discovered abundant opportunity of providing facilities, and was still finding new openings at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly in wide parishes with scattered population. In the middle of the century there was more than one Ayrshire parish without a parish school, and at that date there were



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said to be 175 parishes where the S.P.C.K. had found no parish school. At Forbes (Aberdeenshire) it was reported in the last years of the eighteenth century that "there has never been any legal school in this district: only some of the ministers either kept a school themselves or kept a boy for educating their own children and admitted the children in the neighbourhood to partake of the benefit. The present incumbent applied for a school four years ago, but the application was unsuccessful." Morven (Argyll) at this same period complained that education was very ill-supported by heritors and people; Clyne (Sutherland), that there was no sufficient schooling; and Lochbroom (Ross), that the people were still stupidly indifferent to education. Even where a parish had a school there were often districts not supplied. Thus at Markinch (Fife) the Session in 1702 found a part of the parish neglected and recognising "that the doing of this is an necessary and Christian duty," unanimously agreed that a school must be provided. Often there was no house for the master and parents in turn kept him for a certain period as part payment of fees.

The Act of 1696 had indeed made a fairly general improvement by bringing stronger pressure upon the heritors. The chief trouble after that was in parishes where one school could not be so placed as to be within reach of all the children. Conditions varied very much in different parts of the country. Some heritors were more interested, some more opulent. Some Kirk Sessions were more zealous, some more fortunate in the matter of endowments.

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But everywhere the Church was the driving power, and the Kirk Session generally recognised very fully its duty of supervision. Presbyteries at visitations in the seventeenth century invariably asked about the local educational opportunities, and in 1800 we have the Presbytery of Dunblane enquiring whether all schoolmasters in the bounds were examined and settled by them, insisting that even private teachers should be so tested.

The Session sometimes in a wide parish allowed private or adventure schools (where the fees were the whole emoluments), as at Dunfermline in 1679; but often forbade them, as at Ballingry 1669, Longforgan (Angus) 1697, Greenock 1697, Falkirk 1703, Balmerino (Fife) 1721, where competition prejudiced the schoolmaster's income. Here and there schools for girls were encouraged. At Banff in 1691 "the Session allow to Margaret Crichton, a gentlewoman qualified and undertaking to teach young girls to sew and work lace, etc., the mail of an house for her encouragement." Similarly at Aberdour (Fife) in 1661 and at Hawick in 1712.

The education of poor children was invariably paid for by the Session. The regulation within the Synod of Fife in 1641 was that "if the parents be poor, the Kirk Session shall tak order for paying the schoolmaster his due, either out of the poores box or ellis be a quarterlie collection made for that purpose in the congregation afore divine service, but if the parents be able then let them be oblished to send their bairnes when the Session gives order for it, and not to remove them till the Session be acquainted therewith." Anstruther Wester was providing education for the poor in 1595. Inveraray



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Session records frequently mention payments for education of pauper children, for example about 1650. So at Torryburn 1642, Dalmellington 1649, Balmerino 1668, Yester 1673, Oldhamstocks 1699, and everywhere else. In most cases it was only the most elementary training for which payment was made, but occasionally we have a case, as at Cambuslang towards the close of the seventeenth century, where the elders took a special collection in their districts for the continued education of a boy who "hath an ingine for learning but hath not qrtto to mentane himself at schoole."

Usually the heritors or the town council, with the minister, made the appointment of a teacher, and then the Session made him clerk and precentor, which increased his miserable emoluments. Sometimes Sessions shared in making appointments, or made the appointment themselves, and sometimes they had to find part of his salary or contribute to repairing his house or the school. At Kirkcaldy in 1619 "the elders and deacons being convenient the chusing of ane maister to teach thair yooth, they are content to agrie with Mr. George Buchanan if they can." The Session of Oldmachar appointed a master to the Music School in 1628, and handed over to him a Bible, a Psalm book, Knox's Liturgy, and the Session Records. At Falkirk we find the Session appointing a schoolmaster and paying him. In 1644 they agreed to give for a "doctor" (who was an assistant master) 2/- per child per quarter, the parents to be responsible for another 2/- and the "master" for a similar amount.

Dunnett in his *Invera'an* quotes from the records

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of that Speyside parish an interesting story of the worries of the Session in trying to provide education. The schoolmaster complained of the extreme difficulty he had in collecting the meal which was his chief payment. Some he could never get, and what he did collect was very bad in quality. The Session "finding that what is represented in his petition is true, have agreed that (as he has pleased them and the parish hitherto) tho' their funds are uncertain and precarious," yet in addition to £1 sterling which they gave him as Session Clerk, "if eight pounds Scots of penalties be got in yearly above his present salary and the officer's fee" he shall have it. The Session at Petty (Inverness-shire) in 1665 elected a schoolmaster and promised him certain payments in victual "with all the casualties of baptisms and marriages, as likewise £20 Scotch money for being clerk to Session and precentor in the church." At Oldhamstocks in 1664 the Session along with the heritors selected a teacher. The Town Council and Session at Crail were combining to pay the schoolmaster in 1716. It was the Session which dismissed a teacher at Auchterhouse in 1738. There is an enlightening entry at Alvie (Inverness-shire) in 1732 : "This day Mr. Arthur Gregory represented to the Session that he had now officiated for a year as parish schoolmaster, and that he had no scollars all summer and harvest over and that it was evident that there was no further use for him, upon which account the said Mr. Arthur craved payment of his salary, and demitted his office."

At Inveraray the school was not watertight in 1652 and the several elders were recommended



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to search for straw for it. The Session at Longforgan in 1683 provided four deals to be a bed to the schoolmaster. The forms in the school at Falkirk were "ruinous" in 1703 and the Session had trees cut down in the churchyard to make new ones. The school buildings till well on in the eighteenth century were generally of the most primitive description, and every suggestion of improvements in many parishes was stoutly contested by those whose work it was to protect the interests of heritors.

Sessions did much to encourage parents to send their children to school. The elders at Aberdour (Fife) seem to have been as zealous as any in this respect. In 1650 they fined a man for not sending his boys to school ; next year they made an attempt to have every child from five to fifteen at school ; and two years later they decided to debar from church privileges those who neglected to send their children. The Torryburn elders went round the parish in 1642 and took a census of all from seven to ten, "that they may be put to school," and resolved that parents who were unresponsive should be fined and should make public repentance "for their perjury in breaking the oath made at the baptism of their children." At Yester in 1642 the elders are to delate those who have children "fitt to put to the school and will not do it." The Session of Inveraray in 1677 request the minister to speak to several people who are not sending their children to school. In 1717 the Aberdour elders were again active, visiting their quarters to see that the children went to school, and bringing a list of those who did not.

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School hours and vacations were fixed by Presbyteries—as for Daviot (Aberdeenshire) in 1804. Frequently we find it recorded that the minister intimated in church that school would resume on a certain date, and exhorted the parents to see that the children were sent—as at Oldhamstocks in 1680, and at Hawick in 1714.

Schoolmasters in general were strictly supervised by the Session. Before admission they were tried by some ecclesiastical authority—Superintendent, Bishop or Presbytery, and from 1707 until 1861 they had to sign the Confession of Faith. S.P.C.K. teachers came under similar control. Presbyteries were apparently most concerned about the classical attainments of the candidates, but elders were more interested in their qualifications for church work. At Balingry in 1677 they agree “to take tryall for a time as to his singing and reading in the church” before accepting a nominee. The master elected at Yester in 1759 is found to be “unacquainted with the new method of singing,” and is sent to Edinburgh for a fortnight “to improve himself in the new musick.”

Schools were regularly visited by the Sessions. In 1652 the Aberdour elders report having examined the school children ; in 1674 the Session of Yester “visited the school according to the Act of the Presbytery ;” and in 1746 certain Balmerino elders are delegated to visit the school and report.

The importance of religious instruction was naturally felt by Sessions. The Session at Tynninghame (East Lothian) in 1703 gives a list of the schoolmaster's duties, and all the emphasis is upon religious instruction, morning and evening prayers,



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catechisms, churchgoing, summarising of sermons. The Song Schools (as at Old Aberdeen) made a feature of instruction in the Psalms ; but everywhere Bible and Shorter Catechism were the main school books. Just before the Disruption, Dalsert (Lanarkshire) reported that " in the parish schools the Bible is the standard book and the Assembly's Catechism is regularly taught and explained ; " and in 1835 the minister at Eskdalemuir (Dumfries) states that when he makes his regular visits round the parish " the children bring their Bibles to read a portion, on which they are examined after Gall's method, repeat their catechisms, psalms and paraphrases, commonly with great accuracy " as instructed in school. The Session at Inveraray in 1654 and again in 1679 arranges with the schoolmaster to have boys two by two repeating catechism in church between second and third bell for the edification of their seniors. Similarly at Dunfermline in 1653 and Lochwinnoch (Renfrewshire) in 1691.

Occasionally a woman teacher had the imprimatur of the Session. At Ceres in 1649 we hear of " the woman at Kininmonth that learns the bairns." There was a schoolmistress at Dunglass in Oldhamstocks parish in 1698. And at Inverkeithing in the early eighteenth century the schoolmaster's widow carried on the school with the consent of the Session when her husband was murdered by the Master of Burleigh for the crime of having married her.

Not infrequently Sessions had trouble with regard to the poor character of teachers. They drank or were immoral or were blamed for keeping

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alehouses. The schoolmaster at Kirkcaldy in 1638 is "sharply and gravely admonished" for striking a boy "till he is become sick;" and in the same place in 1663 it is brought to the Session's notice that the "doctor" might be admonished "to be more calm to the scholars and not so outrageous in his speeches to them." The master of Inveraray Grammar School in 1659 is discovered to be lending out boys to go errands for people. Teachers also suffered for religious or political unorthodoxy. One near St. Andrews had to be discharged in 1666 for having "flatly refused to obey the Acts of the Synod anent reading and singing the Doxologie." In 1716 the headmaster at Brechin was deposed as a Jacobite, and masters at Fetteresso, Dunnottar, Fettercairn and elsewhere were similarly treated.

In most cases, however, the teacher would be an exemplary person, no doubt himself an elder, in many cases a licentiate or a Divinity student, zealous for the Church and for religious education, and eager to prepare hopeful youths for college and the pulpit. In 1677 only one teacher within the bounds of the Presbytery of Turriff was not a licentiate of the Church of Scotland.

The chief hindrance was certainly the poor financial provision. The evil of this was well understood throughout the Church. It is very interesting to mark the references to this in so many of the reports sent in for the *Old Statistical Account*—for instance from Watten (Caithness), Lochbroom (Ross-shire), Glenorchy (Argyll), Cluny (Aberdeen), Saline (Fife), Cadder (Lanark), Kilmaronock (Dunbarton), Kilwinning (Ayr), Rerrick (Kirkcudbright), Morton (Dumfries), and others.



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The report from Athelstaneford (East Lothian) is typical : " It is indeed much to be regretted that so useful a class of men should be so poorly rewarded for their laborious services, and it reflects no honour upon the landed interest of Scotland that in the late attempt the schoolmasters made to get some addition to their livings, they met with such violent and determined opposition."

Sessions had difficulty in moving heritors. These were often themselves members of the Session, or they were non-resident and represented by a factor who had to keep down expenses, or they were at least the dominant persons in the parish, to whom it was not easy to dictate. Yet the work went on, and education won its way to general popularity by the end of the eighteenth century. Dr. James Campbell has pointed out that between 1716 and 1748 few of the male witnesses and practically none of the female who are mentioned in the Session minutes of Balmerino could write. It has to be remembered (a point which H. G. Graham has overlooked) that these are not exactly representative, but belonged chiefly to the lowest stratum of the parishioners, so that Campbell's figures are not important statistically; but the reported state of affairs must have been pretty general at that date. By the time of the *Old Statistical Account*, however, we find numerous parishes which can boast as does Dailly (Ayrshire) that "there is scarcely an individual in the parish who has not been taught to read and write." Speaking of the teachers of those earlier times, Dr. Norman Macleod has said : "Take them all in all, they were a singular body of men ; their humble homes and poor salaries and

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hard work, presented a remarkable contrast to their manners, abilities and literary culture. Scotland owes to them a debt of gratitude that never can be repaid."

One function of the elder which ideally is of the utmost value and which has at times been of actual importance to the Church is that of representing the Session in the Higher Courts.

At Geneva the system of graded courts, later so characteristic of Presbyterianism, had no scope for complete development, and it was from France that Scotland took the most important hints. Scotland learned well and achieved a more satisfactory scheme than, for example, Holland or Hungary or Switzerland.

The General Assembly could only have been suggested by French experience. At first in Scotland the General Assembly was a small body, meeting twice a year, consisting of ministers and laymen, acting as an appeal court, controlling the superintendents and visitors, formulating the policy of the Church and negotiating with the State. In 1560, 12 ministers and 30 laymen were present, but there was no restriction of the laymen to such as were elders, and this continued to be the case for some time. No discussion of the matter or decision upon it took place. The point was not noticed. Those who were needed or were specially interested—the natural and actual leaders of the Reformation—were present. These would normally be elders. Indeed John Row calls them "ruleing elders." The official records, however, do not. The customary expression is "commissioners," sometimes distinguishing individuals as "elder



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and commissioner," while in December, 1563, those reported present are classed as superintendents, ministers and commissioners, barons, burgesses and gentlemen. In 1568 it is ruled that ministers and commissioners of shires be chosen at the Synod, and commissioners of burghs by the Town Council and Session together ; but it is not stipulated that they must be elders. The laymen at the Assembly represented state interests, burghs and districts as well as particular kirks. The practice of sending elders was of course general. Thus St. Andrews in 1575 sent two elders (both bailies) to represent the burgh and kirk.

The *Second Book of Discipline* makes a definite limitation that "none ar subject to repaire to this assemblie to vote bot ecclesiasticall persons . . . not excluding uther persons that will repaire to the said assemblie to propone, heir and reason." The rule, however, cannot have been scrupulously observed, especially in the case of those present to represent other than purely spiritual interests, for in 1586 the Assembly re-enacted it, and in 1597 the arrangement had again to be made clear. In 1590 the King addressed the gathering as "my good people, ministers, doctors, elders, nobles, gentlemen and barons," so that still the Assembly is more of a national than a purely ecclesiastical body, and indeed we know that it was the one truly representative institution in the country, Parliament in Scotland being in no way comparable to the body similarly named in England. Noblemen and others who had private ends to serve had to depend upon what they could achieve in and through the Assembly, and it was therefore

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important to be a member. The King was at no time interested in having elders present as such, and in those meetings which were arranged specially to suit his purposes, as at Linlithgow 1608, Glasgow 1610, Aberdeen 1616 and Perth 1618, ruling elders from the Presbyteries were not invited. Indeed some doubt about the whole matter evidently lingered, for in 1648 the Assembly had again to declare that only elders might appear as commissioners from burghs and in 1718 the regulation was repeated.

Except for outstanding nobles sent by the King no laymen made any mark in the General Assemblies of the early seventeenth century. In the interests of an Episcopalian settlement the older custom was discouraged, and there were no Assemblies at all after 1618. One of the most important steps taken by the early Covenanters when at last an Assembly was guaranteed was to ensure the restoration of the ruling elder to a position of effectiveness.

The Glasgow Assembly of 1638 accomplished the overthrow of Episcopacy to a considerable extent through the presence of a full complement of elders, mostly men of position, noblemen, landed gentry, leading lawyers, and heads of municipalities. Henry Guthrie shows how the Covenanting leaders corresponded with the Presbyteries and arranged to have two or three ministers and one elder from each, as well as burgh elders, enjoining them to see that well affected noblemen or gentlemen were sent, "whereby it came to pass that all the noblemen who were furious in the cause were elected either in one Presbytery or other."



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The King demanded that the clerical commissioners from Presbyteries be chosen by the ministers only, "and that no lay person whatsoever meddle in the choice." The Bishops in their declinature made much of the same point. The clerical representatives to the Assembly were voted upon by a body including a layman from each parish, usually the laird and therefore influential, while the lay voice was made particularly decisive by the absence of some ministers and by the exclusion from the voting of all those whose names were proposed as commissioners. The Tables relied upon the *Second Book of Discipline* and upon the decision of the Dundee Assembly of 1597; but the Bishops denied that that gave elders any warrant "to deliberate and determine," though it was admitted that they might be present and assist with their advice, having no "definite and decisive voice," such as would be "intrusion upon the pastoral charge." A similar line was taken by other Episcopally inclined ministers in their supplication to the Assembly. Clearly they regarded elders as laymen pure and simple.

The King instructed Hamilton to do what he could to have the lay elders excluded as in the previous reign, but the Covenanters intrigued actively and were successful in packing the Assembly with friends both clerical and lay. It is quite plain from the experience of the Aberdeen Doctor that in practice only Covenanters could contrive to be elected. In addition to those who were members, many keen Presbyterians were present as assessors to discuss and advise privately on important issues. The Assembly, when it met

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protested that the King's Commissioner should represent one vote only, and that beyond that none but ministers and elders duly chosen by Presbyteries, Burghs and Universities should have a voice. Elders took an active share in the proceedings and on the Committees.

Hamilton, in the speech in which he officially declared the Assembly dissolved, made a great deal of this matter of the presence of lay elders, and especially of the fact that clerical members had been sent to that Assembly by the votes of elders having outweighed those of ministers, instancing Lanark and other Presbyteries, and recalling the stress laid by the *Book of Discipline* upon the equality of the lay and clerical members of Presbyteries. He hinted at various irregularities which indicate that the Covenanters in their effort to "mak siccar" had not always been too scrupulous, and he inveighed against ruling elders as a "burden" to the ministry. His speech is important as summing up very pointedly the contemporary objections to the eldership.

During the succeeding period elders played a considerable part in the Assemblies and Commissions of Assembly, and Sessions were interested in the appointments both of ministers and of elders for the occasion. Alyth Session minutes (for example, 1641, 1642, 1643) mention elders sent to the Presbytery at Meigle to "voyse for chusing commissioners to the next generale Assemblie." The Scots congregation at Campvere in Holland was reprov'd in 1643 for omitting to send an elder to the General Assembly, and was warned to send a minister and elder at least once in three years,



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a concession on account of expense. Assemblies ceased under the Cromwellian dictatorship and were not resumed till the Revolution Settlement. After this date, although noblemen still took an interest in the proceedings, the chief laymen were burghers and lawyers. The Union of the Parliaments made London the centre of interest for the great or would-be great.

Sometimes far-away Presbyteries had to be reminded of their privileges and rights in the matter, as had North Isles, Alford and Strathbogie in 1749. We also see the beginning of a custom which is one of the weaknesses of the present system of Assembly representation, Presbyteries nominating elders who have only the most formal connection with the parishes they are supposed to represent, so that the Assembly is (though fortunately only to a small extent) packed by prominent persons, and—what is worse—by Church officials, who form an almost constant and therefore influential nucleus.

The Assemblies of the second half of the eighteenth century must in their way have been exceedingly interesting—formal and pedantic no doubt, but as brilliant in oratory as any court on record. "Jupiter" Carlyle tells us that about 1750 "the General Assembly became a theatre for young lawyers to display their eloquence and exercise their talents," and one year at a later period he notes as remarkable because "when a most important overture was debated there was neither one of the judges nor of the crown lawyers in the Assembly." Referring to years round about 1760, Somerville reports: "Many Lords of Session, advocates and country gentlemen of rank

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and opulence sat as ruling elders on the benches of the General Assembly, and both by their presence and the part they took in its business contributed to the dignity of the court ; and some of those Scottish gentlemen who were afterwards most highly distinguished in Parliament first gave promise of eminent capacity for public affairs in the Assembly."

In the highest court of the Secession Churches, as these developed, elders were at least as important. They were not from precisely the same class, being rather successful business men, not perhaps excelling in oratory, but with zeal, which was a most effective instrument in the hands of the Church. They were able to be present oftener at the annual meetings, for the Church of Scotland rotation system kept out all but the very knowing or the very favoured from regular membership, and the Secession Churches assigned elders an equality in numbers with ministers in Courts and Committees, which was not the case in the national Church.

At the Church of Scotland provincial Synods in the earliest Reformation period elders were present. Explicit statement is again reached in the *Second Book of Discipline*, and when Presbyteries were set up the same rule applied to them. At Geneva there had been no elders in the Venerable Company, which was the corresponding court, but in France there was a system exactly like what developed in Scotland. Quick's *Synodicon* shows the full scheme at work for a hundred years. In Holland the strong feeling of independence in the different provinces has militated against uniform-



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ity, but in varying proportions elders have been members of the provincial synods and of the local consistories. Even in describing the days in Scotland before Presbyteries properly existed Row says that there was "ane elder accompanieing each minister, meeting together everie week at the Exercise," and he mentions the presence of ruling elders at the Synods.

In practice it proved difficult to sift out elders who had both interest and leisure to attend Presbytery and Synod. In 1582 there is a complaint that there are no elders in the newly established Presbyteries in the Mearns. And in connection with the Glasgow Assembly of 1638 it was repeatedly alleged that the presence of elders at Presbyteries had been in abeyance for some forty years. This was possibly an over-statement, but we know that Kirkcaldy Presbytery had no ruling elder at its meetings for the eight years previous to that Assembly and it was generally agreed that the custom had been intermitted.

After 1638 there was a determined effort to improve the situation, but it was never very successful. Sessions commonly appointed one of their number to represent them, but the representatives in many cases made no attendances and Synod and Presbytery records show few elders in the sederunt. The Assembly which met at Aberdeen in 1640 passed a rule that each Session should select four or five of its ablest to go each in turn to the Presbytery, and if one could not attend when his day came he had to arrange with another to take his place, those who were absent or unrepresented to be rebuked by the Presbytery and any

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who were negligent to be disqualified from being elders. The Synod of Dunkeld complained to the Assembly of 1641 about the remissness of elders in attending, and the Assembly of 1643 had the matter before it with respect to the Synod of Argyll, while the Synod of Perth showed similar anxiety about the problem in 1647, 1651, and 1659. The sederunt of the Synod of Aberdeen in April, 1652, is evidence that things were no better there. Some sessions only sent an elder to the Presbytery when the Assembly commissioners were to be selected, and frequently there was only perhaps a single enthusiastic laird to represent the laity at an ordinary Presbytery meeting. The country elder had his day's work to do, and it was a matter of some difficulty for him to travel to the Presbytery centre, and the business was not such that he could contribute easily. On the other hand elders could apparently turn out on occasion, for it was the number of ruling elders that carried things for the Protesters at the Synod of Glasgow in 1651.

The Presbytery elder was sometimes selected for each separate meeting. This was the practice at Yester, which in 1646 chose one of their number "to be ruling elder at the Presbyterie for a moneth." In 1642 they selected Lord Yester to represent them at an approaching Synod meeting in Edinburgh. In the same way the Oldhamstocks Session picked someone to accompany the minister—as in 1642, 1644, etc. Fenwick Session in 1644 nominated Sir Wm. Muir, yr., of Rowallan, "rueling elder for ye presbiterie and synode and gives him full power and aucttie to that effect as besemes." Yester in 1652 chose its representative from a



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leet of three after a vote. From 1642 until 1661 Dalmellington very regularly appointed two elders to attend Presbytery meetings in turn until the next Synod.

When Episcopacy was restored there was a certain amount of preliminary hesitation as to what was to be done about the regular Church courts, but their great usefulness was too obvious to be overlooked, and Presbyteries and Synods were soon in active operation again. There was, however, the difference that no elders were called to them. The Privy Council order for their resumption of their duties clearly limits the members of the Presbyteries to ministers, and the St. Andrews diocesan records show that the same applied to Synods.

After 1690 elders were restored to their place in these courts. Appointment for the half-year from Synod to Synod was common as at Mauchline in 1691. The entry at Anstruther Easter in 1691 bears that someone was appointed "ruling elder to accompanie the minister at Synods and that the Sessione should pay the expences." In the same parish in 1735 the question was raised as to whether a substitute could be sent when the Presbytery elder was at sea, but it was decided to do nothing in the matter. At Oldhamstocks in 1695 one of the first acts of the newly appointed Presbyterian minister was to have an elder elected to attend Presbytery and Synod. One who was chosen at Yester in 1704 complained that all his horses were busy and he had none to spare, so the Session ordered a horse to be hired to take him to the Synod. We trace constantly the difficulty of

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finding men free to attend. The Hawick minutes in 1717 bear that no elder has been to the Synod "these severall times" and the Session now makes a point of electing one to attend an approaching meeting. The minutes of the Presbytery of Deer from 1710 to 1733 seldom record the presence of more than a single ruling elder. In towns it was somewhat different and laymen did take a more interested if somewhat silent part in Presbytery work. In the latter part of the century the appointment is usually noted as "for the ensuing half-year," as at Oxnam in 1775. So in Aberdeen Associate Church—for example, in 1758.

All the ministers were members of Presbytery and Synod and were permanent members. Only one elder from each parish was eligible to attend, and unless reappointed his period of office might be very short. There was thus nothing very democratic about the arrangement, but lay opinion was not excluded, and potentially it was of the greatest importance to have a system of government so representative.

Sometimes even now the expression "ruling elder" is thought to apply only to the representative elder to Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly, and this elder is given a special place at Communion or at Session meetings. This is entirely wrong, but the mistake is easy to understand, for the representative has always to be distinctly called a "ruling elder" to distinguish him from the ministerial representatives. He is "ruling elder" by comparison with the minister and not by comparison with his fellow elders, but careless thinking and careless wording of minutes has caused the



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misunderstanding. Guthrie and Renwick in the seventeenth century are found pointing out the error ; but it occurs frequently in Session records, as for example at Dalmellington from 1650 onwards, at Anstruther Easter in 1660, at Oldhamstocks in 1697, and regularly for some years from 1834 at Oldmachar.

The Session had a good deal to do with the election of ministers. The law with regard to election altered from time to time. The *First Book of Discipline* is quite clear in its assertion that "it appertaineth to the people, and to every several congregation, to elect their minister." The *Second Book of Discipline* defines this more particularly as election "be the judgement of the eldership and consent of the congregation," emphasizing that "na person be intrusit in ony of the offices of the kirk contrar to the will of the congregation . . . or without the voice of the eldership." "Eldership" in the *Second Book of Discipline* means "Presbytery" and not "Kirk Session." In practice there was never any attempt to have universal or even manhood suffrage in the case of an election of a minister. No one dreamt of such a thing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Democracy in name was aristocracy in fact ; and heritors, elders and a few heads of families acted in the name of the people, and would have been very much astonished had their action been called in question. The consent of the congregation was that formal acquiescence which social conditions rendered inevitable. The *Second Book of Discipline*, however, is emphatic in its objection to patronage and presentation and its expression of a desire to have this reformed.

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Patronage was the rule till 1649, when by Act of Parliament it was abolished. The Act Rescissory of 1661 rescinded this along with all other Acts of the period, and in 1662 an Act was passed 'concerning such benefices and stipends as have been possessed without presentations from the lawful patrons.' The Revolution Settlement brought an Act concerning Patronages, 1690, by which the practice was declared to have been abused and to be inconvenient and was accordingly abolished. It was restored, however, in 1712, much against the will of the Church, the restoration being regarded as in the interests of Episcopacy and Jacobitism, and even to be a breach of the Treaty of Union of 1707. The new Act certainly contributed largely towards the subsequent troubles of the Church in Scotland. For a time after 1712 one hears of practically no attempt on the part of patrons to press unpopular rights, the people's wishes being accepted or the matter allowed to fall into the hands of the Presbytery. Next followed a period of confused usage, and then a determined struggle between the Moderates and the Evangelicals, involving the Secessions and ultimately a complete split between those within the Church who acquiesced in patronage and those who would have nothing but the popular call.

Social conditions had changed greatly by the middle of the eighteenth century. Individual members of congregations had some capacity for making a choice of a spiritual leader, and patrons were sometimes non-resident and unfamiliar with the needs of the parish, or were Episcopalians or themselves attracted by a type unacceptable to simple



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evangelical congregations. Patronage had its good points, even as compared with present methods but its imperfections became a party cry, and thereafter it could do no good thing. The law was unaltered in the Church of Scotland till 1874 when democratic feeling led to its abandonment and congregational election was accepted as in the Secession Churches and Free Church. The general question need not delay us further, but we must note how elders were involved at the different periods.

Just after the Reformation they had some real say in the towns. At Peebles for example in 1561 the minister was elected by the elders and deacons. The Session was normally more influential in such matters in burghs than it was in the country for in burghs the Town Council generally had the patronage, and Council and Session worked hand in hand and were sometimes almost indistinguishable. An interesting election at Edinburgh in 1621 is noted by Calderwood. In this case the minister was appointed by the old and new Council and the old and new Session, "the rest of the citizens to the number of two hundred persons their voices not craved as hath been the custom in the election of their pastors." The influence of the King and Bishops was here in evidence.

After 1649 elections were in the hands of the Kirk Session, the people being asked if they acquiesced and consented, the Presbytery, always, trying qualifications, a minority of the Session or congregation being allowed to offer objections, of which the Presbytery was judge. Here and there arose the question as to whether

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Deacons were members of Session for the purposes of the Act.

A very interesting series of elections are recorded in the *Presbytery Book of Strathbogie* in the years 1647 to 1650, which show almost all sides of the question, and are worthy of careful study. Both under the old system and under the new, the elders appear prominently.

Other ways in which a Kirk Session might represent the congregation in connection with the election of a minister are indicated by the successful resistance offered by the St. Andrews Session in 1660 to an attempt to translate their minister to another charge.

After 1690 the election was in the hands of the heritors and the Session, the formal consent of the congregation being added. An example may be given. At Alves in 1696 the minute reads : " Convened the heritors, elders, and several of the householders of the parish, who unanimously elected the very reverend Mr. John Gilchrist (for the present minister at Leith) to be minister of this place." Oxnam minutes in 1700 refer to a minister " unanimously called by the elders, heritors and others of the parish." At Oldhamstocks in 1705 the elders, heritors and heads of family met at the close of a week-day service and unanimously nominated a minister, proceeding thereafter to draw up and subscribe a call which was sent to absent heritors for their signature.

Thomas Boston tells us incidentally of calls to Abbey St. Bathans in 1698, where the elders were divided in their sympathies, to Clackmannan in the same year when " the elders could not prevail



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with the heritors to join in a call to me," to Simprin soon afterwards, where there were only two elders at the time, and to Ettrick in 1706, where the call was at first from the Presbytery *jure devoluto*, but had ultimately the concurrence of the parish as represented by heritors, elders and "several masters of families."

Even after 1712 a somewhat similar process was common. The record at Inverness in 1720 shows that the magistrates, councillors, heritors, wadsetters, liferenters and elders met and together elected a minister by a great majority of voices, though one bailie entered dissent. As late as 1733 we read of the heritors at Culross objecting to an increase in the number of elders, as that would upset the balance of influence between them and the elders in the election of a minister. In the case of Keithhall (Aberdeenshire) in 1721 two names were proposed to the Earl of Kintore, the patron, but he left the matter to the Presbytery. This court sent one of its number to enquire of the elders regarding their preference. For a time he could elicit no expression of opinion whatever from these cautious rustics, but finally one man ventured to indicate a preference and further investigation showed that this was the general mind. The Presbytery accordingly elected the favourite. At Banchory Devenick (Kincardine) in 1728 the patron's right was likewise allowed to lapse and "a popular call" was given, upon which the Presbytery took action. In the same year the Town Council and Kirk Session of Aberdeen made a list of four and then consulted "the heads of family who were of the Presbyterian Communion,"

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and accepted the candidate who secured strongest support. Such instances show how almost any system works satisfactorily provided there is good will.

The danger, however, is revealed in connection with a vacancy at Urquhart in 1740, where those opposed to the presentee threaten that if he is appointed "they will write some of the members of the Associate Presbytery or their disciples to be their preachers, and that some of the neighbouring parishes will go in with them." The complaint was that the presentee's voice was "too low," but the real objection was not to the individual selected.

There followed the critical period of the disputed elections. These are detailed by Morren in his *Annals*, and the account deserves heedful attention. Here we need only note what a considerable part was played in these parochial conflicts by elders, who were obviously the leaders of the people. The zeal which some of them manifested was afterwards the making and life of the Secession Churches.

The interesting case of Lady Yester's, Edinburgh, in 1763, resulted in a decision that the practice of the Town Council to consult and indeed to act jointly with the Kirk Session in electing ministers was not legally binding on them. It had come to be a matter of rights, even more than of public weal. And in such circumstances it was natural that the Church should keep on petitioning year after year for the abolition of Patronage. In 1782 even such an outside body as the Guildry of Stirling agreed to petition for the revival of the Act of 1690,



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with the extension of the power of voting to heads of families, as well as heritors and elders.

After the minister was elected the Session had naturally special responsibilities with regard to his settlement. The Presbytery ordained or inducted only the ministerial members laying hands upon the ordinand in accordance with the general Presbyterian practice, after which the Presbytery and then the heritors, elders and members of the congregation gave the new minister "the right hand of fellowship."

Tribute is due to elders in regard to the share they took in building up the Secession Churches. The original Seceders were ministers, but their attitude found a response in many quarters, among the shepherds of the borders, and wherever praying societies had maintained something of the evangelical enthusiasm of the Covenanters.

The Erskines would have lost many opportunities of establishing and confirming congregations had it not been for elders who held the people together until adequate provision of ordinances could be made. Wherever the Associate Presbytery recognised any encouragement, one of the first steps was the constitution of a Kirk Session. Small's account of the beginnings of the Church at Bridge of Teith is typical. "This congregation included at the outset, according to their own records, all the dissenters in the parishes of Kilmadock, Callander, Dunblane, Lecropt and part of Port. There had been stray accessions from that district for years, and on 17th July, 1740, the elders among them were constituted into a Session by Ebenezer Erskine. There were six in number,

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and a leet of candidates was that day given in from the Praying Societies within the bounds, which resulted on 3rd September in the ordination of seven others. Next February a further accession of five elders and about 50 private persons was followed by a petition for supply of preaching, with a representation of their clamant circumstances. Though provided with a Session of their own, they still formed part of Mr. Erskine's congregation and very rarely had sermon for themselves. . . . In 1746 the elders reported that as appointed, they had traversed each his own district to ascertain whether there was ripeness for a moderation, and they found the people desirous that it be brought about as soon as possible."

At Logie (near Stirling) the Session as a body seceded and formed what became the Relief congregation. Elders were responsible for the foundation of Anderston (Relief) Church in Glasgow (1769). Other illustrations occur in Tait's *Border Life*.

It is not surprising to find that the Session in such churches had much say in the appointment of a minister. The Session was in the habit of making suggestions as a Session, though the congregation was not bound to follow their guidance. At Aberdeen Associate Church (Melville) in 1794 the Session unanimously put forward one name, and "went constitute into the meeting house." Members of the congregation proposed three other names, and an open vote was taken. The Session candidate was elected, and a call forthwith signed.

Later practice gave the elders in Secession



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Churches more say on vacancy committees than has ever been the case in the Church of Scotland. In the United Free Church before Union the elders and deacons or managers were *ex officio* on a such committee that might be appointed, while in the Church of Scotland elders were merely in the same position as all other communicants in this respect.

It was a recognised function of the Presbytery to supervise the work of ministers and Session in the parishes within their bounds. In some districts and at some periods this was very diligently attempted, though the reminders by Assembly in 1638, 1700 and 1706 indicate that the duty was not always and everywhere honoured. The accounts of such visitations are extremely interesting as showing the main features of the congregational life, and they bring out various functions of the Kirk Session to which attention should be called. A short characteristic account from the early seventeenth century may be taken from the records of the Presbytery of Deer, 1608.

"The said day after removing of the pastor the elderscippe with members of the congregation present being tryit and posit upon thair aith an fidelitie concerning thair minister his fidelitie and diligence in his calling, preiching of the word and exerceising of discipline, his honestie in gudly lyff and conversation amonges tham, anssrit severall in ane voice w<sup>t</sup> uplyfftit handes befor God th<sup>t</sup> thair pastor was cairfull and diligent in his offic his doctrine sound and plaine to the grypt comfort and capacitie of the heireris, in the exerceiss of discipline painfull, in lyff and conversation hone

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to the guid exempill of utheris. Lykweyes the minister gave ane guid testimonie of the forwardnes and willingnes of the eldeschipe to the outbering of the word of God and suppressing of sin amanges tham. Thair is found catechising reiding and preiching on the Sabbothe befor nowne, comon prayers on the Sabboth efternowne, exerceiss of disciplin everie fifteen dayes, warders for outholding off strang and abell begeris, ouklie collectione for the pour. The minister and elderschipe are exhortit to have due cair and use all diligence for plantein and maintaining ane schoul amanges tham for training upe off the youth and to report thair diligence at the nixt visitatione. The minister ordeinit w<sup>t</sup> advyse of his elderschipe for to teiche on the Sabbath day at efternowne, speciallie in the summer tyme, giff ony wayes he may have ane auditorie. The buik of disciplein delyverit to Mr. James Martin for to visit it."

The regulations issued by the Synod of Aberdeen in 1674 are very fully stated in the minutes and make an engaging study. The elders are strictly questioned in great detail regarding the character and usefulness of the minister, and the minister is then examined as to the diligence of the elders in delating offences, assisting in discipline, reporting on the condition of the poor. Heritors, elders and heads of families with the minister are tried as to the condition of the parish; the mortifications; the educational facilities, the character of the schoolmaster, and whether he thrashes children for lying, swearing, disobedience to parents; the fabric of the church, the stipend, the utensils for Communion; the prevailing faults of the



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parishioners, the state of church attendance and the example shown by those responsible for the spiritual well-being of the parish.

Steuart of Pardovan in the early eighteenth century devotes a chapter to the subject of parochial visitations by the Presbyteries, and notes the examination of the Session records, enquiry as to whether the elders have been properly admitted, how they attend church and Session meetings, whether they have family worship, are guilty of ignorance or superstition, tippling or swearing, visit their districts, have subscribed the Confession of Faith, are well affected to Presbyterianism, and so on.

The Assembly of June, 1562, recorded that elders were responsible for seeing to the doctrine, life, manners and conversation of the minister. By the eighteenth century this was thought rather a matter for the Presbyteries directly, but in 1609 we read of the Kinghorn Session fining the minister 20 shillings for giving a testimonial to a man contrary to a Session resolution. From about the middle of the century they were also careful as to the subjects of preaching and apparently set a high standard, for at Alyth in 1652 there is the entry : " No preatching, except onlie ane Englishe trooper went up to the pulpit and made ane forme of ane preatching who had no warrand to preatche." Cases of want of sermon are noted by the Session and the cause stated—the minister at a Communion elsewhere, or sick, or at Assembly, perhaps the schoolmaster reading prayers. Auchterderran reports in 1740 : " No sermon—the minister being deid."

Along with the minister, the elders had the

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supervision of the whole religious life of the community. In the towns the magistrates shared in the work, the respective spheres being long but ill-defined. It was not always clear who was responsible for originating intimations, arranging fasts, and fixing special celebrations. Sometimes orders came from the Privy Council, perhaps through Synod and Presbytery. At other times the General Assembly issued the instruction. Or again the particular Kirk Session might decide with regard to a merely local occasion. The discouragement of superstitious practices at Christmas was a national matter, the use of the *Westminster Directory* was a command of the Assembly. But Session minutes record also more local arrangements as at Aberdeen, where in 1615 a fast was decreed "because of severe frost and snow," or as at Ceres in 1684, where there was a day of humiliation "for the coldness, rigor and severity of the winter and unseasonableness of the spring and coldness thereof." In 1762 a member of Aberdeen Associate Church was admonished for attending an auction on a day set aside in the congregation as a fast. Fast days were like Sundays. Newmachar Session in 1696 exhorted the people "to keep Tuesday throughout the whole and to abstaine from worke and to conveen to church and hear sermon."

The precentor was employed by the Session and subject to its jurisdiction, and care was taken that candidates for the post of schoolmaster had capacity in leading the singing. At Aberdeen in 1604 the Session told the people to bring Bibles and psalmbooks to church and "quha can reid



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sall lerne to sing and prais God publictlie;" and at Oldmachar in 1646 the congregation were enjoined by the Session that they should "all joyne together in the singing off the psalme and thos that cannot sing to give attentione and follow thos yt can sing." The metrical psalms alone were in use, even in the Episcopalian periods, until paraphrases made their appearance in 1781. The 1635 Psalter had considerable merit, but the 1650 version superseded it, though comparatively few tunes were actually employed, and in the early eighteenth century seldom any but the twelve common tunes. Doune Antiburgher Session rebuked the precentor for introducing a new psalm tune, and Aberdeen Associate Church only permitted a few additions with great hesitation and as an experiment, though on the other hand in 1719 Banff Session allowed the music master a guinea for having composed a new tune to be sung in church. Reading of the line was introduced after the Westminster Assembly, but attempts to abandon it led to more than one congregation severing its connection with the Church of Scotland as a protest against the innovation—for example, at Tough in Aberdeenshire and Langton in Berwick.

At the services the elders often sat by themselves in a special seat under the pulpit, until in the nineteenth century they were ousted by the choir.

The visitation of the sick is frequently mentioned as a function of the elder, as for example by the Assembly of December, 1563, and in the *Second Book of Discipline*. At Carnock (Fife) in 1660 "the elders were exhorted to visit the sick more frequently, for the minister declared that the sick

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old him yt few or none of the elders came to them and they were sharply rebuked." Guthrie in the seventeenth century, and King, Lorimer and Dickson in the nineteenth, all stress this duty. Inveraray Session in 1650 made a rule that the sick must intimate to their elder so that he might inform the minister. In 1644 there is an entry at Petty (Inverness): "This day the minister did enquire of the elders and deacons if they knew of any persons that were sick in their divisions. . . . The minister promised to visit them on Monday." *Scottish Presbyterian Eloquence Displayed* holds up to ridicule one unfortunate elder in the early eighteenth century whose knowledge of the Bible proved inadequate as he prayed with a dying man.

Matters of general Church interest or of public importance often came before Sessions. In the seventeenth century these were a regular channel of communication between Government and people. Kirkcaldy Session petitioned in 1636 against Laud's Service Book as "likely to lead to some great stour and commotion amongst the commons." At Falkirk in 1643 the Session assigned elders to various parts of the church and set up a table before the pulpit in connection with the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant. The Session at Anstruther Easter in 1737 had before it the Porteous Act, which was ordered to be read in churches. The Session appealed to the Commission of Assembly on the ground that this was an infringement of the liberties, rights and privileges of the Church and not agreeable to the Confession of Faith. Later in the century Sessions had to face the problem of Catholic Emancipation. The



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Sessions of seceding congregations had also various questions sent down to them, and at the close of the eighteenth century were involved in discussing the civil magistrate's power in religious matters. A curious duty laid upon elders by the State at one time was that of seeing that all corpses were coffined in woollen shrouds according to an Act of 1705. One recalls Pope's lines :

“ ‘ ‘Odious ! in woollen ! ’twould a saint provoke,’  
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke.”

In 1745 the elders and deacons of St. Cuthbert's Edinburgh, were making lists of able-bodied men in their districts to defend the city against the rebels. At Cullen in 1751 a man brought up from infancy as a Roman Catholic compeared before the Session and renounced “ the errors of Popery.” The Kirk Session treasurer of Oldmachar was busy at the beginning of the nineteenth century paying out money for the government to soldiers' wives. And even now Kirk Sessions have duties in connection with applications to be placed upon the poor roll with a view to action in the civil courts. There is scarcely any parish whose records do not contain mention of some rather surprising activity on the part of the Session.

From an early date Sessions were responsible for parish registers with regard to baptism, burial, etc. Registration was a difficult thing to inculcate in Scotland owing to certain superstitions, but in many places great care was taken and valuable information preserved. The old records are in the Register House, Edinburgh, and now State officials do the work. Session minutes, like those

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of Presbyteries, are also invaluable to the researcher. They contain incidentally a great deal of important information not merely about ecclesiastical affairs, but about economics, education, biography, social history, primitive superstitions, meteorology, etc. It is gross ignorance to dismiss them as mere agglomerations of scandalous tales. To anyone with an eye for the significant they are documents of first rate importance for the study of Scottish history and conditions. The present state of matters with regard to the Records of the Church is far from satisfactory. Many important documents have been lost through the general careless attitude, and one frequently hears tales of the accidental discovery or romantic rescue of interesting papers, and can see how very easy it has been for such property to go astray. Attempts have been made to collect Synod, Presbytery and Session records in the Tolbooth Church and at 121 George Street, Edinburgh, but those most willing to send in their records are naturally those who appreciate their value and in whose possession the documents would probably be safe. Much more requires to be done for the preservation of the records. Much more also requires to be done for the study of these. The History of our Church has for the most part been written without reference to them. A Church of the historical importance of the Church of Scotland should at least have a full-time archivist, with such authority and responsibilities as would better safeguard our documents and more fully make their contents available. At some periods Session records were more carelessly kept than at others. Much depended upon the clerk. Records



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of the second half of the eighteenth century contain little valuable matter, for Sessions were less active then than formerly. But on the whole the Session Books were accurately, fully and very legibly kept, and the Scottish Session clerk deserves a special word of praise. Presbyteries are now obliged to attest parish records and this ensures that the proper information is regularly minuted and that Session affairs are conducted on sound business lines.

This survey of "other functions" indicates how very widespread were the responsibilities of Kirk Sessions at one time or another in the history of the institution, and offers a picture of truly astonishing activity which must make anyone conscious that the highest interests and the fullest well-being of the people were to a great extent dependent upon the zeal of ruling elders.

## VI

### CONTROVERSY

THE seventeenth century was a great age of controversy in Scotland—controversy for the most part petty and unimaginative. One tendency involved an Episcopal system of government, and the opposition which finally triumphed in 1690 implied Presbyterianism. Both parties seem to us to have spent a great deal of their time in making deductions from false premises, but the urge in the case of each was genuine enough and the struggle was more important than anyone would realise who merely concerned himself with particular incidents or particular arguments.

Most of the discussion was about Bishops and Presbyters. The literature around this topic is very considerable, English writers, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Independent, taking part, as well as Scottish stalwarts such as Calderwood, Rutherford, the Gillespies, and others similarly rudite and scholastic. The Eldership naturally did not receive so much attention. It was somewhat summarily dismissed on the one hand, and somewhat dogmatically assumed on the other. By Presbyterians the Ruling Eldership was believed to be of divine institution, strictly scriptural, and many regarded it as a necessary part of the constitution



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of the Christian Church. It was accepted as an inheritance from Calvin and Beza, and some were content (like Charles Ferme, d. 1617, in his *Commentary on Romans*) not even to discuss the possibility of doubt as to "elders who do not teach." In Scotland everybody accepted the Ruling Elder, though all did not hold the same theories as to the nature of the office. The Kirk Session was recognised as a necessary piece of the social machinery. Even those who hesitated about its divinity and biblical origin were unable to see how it could be done without. The secularising process was a nineteenth century solution and could scarcely have suggested itself to a seventeenth century mind.

One of the most important Presbyterian utterances on the subject was the *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (1641), by George Gillespie, a brilliant young debater, who was afterwards one of the Scots in attendance at the Westminster Assembly, and on his return became minister of St. Giles's Church, Edinburgh. His views represent the Presbyterian extreme, refusing the distinction of clergy from laity as "Popish and anti-Christian," and so objecting to the term "lay elder." He accepts the biblical institution of the Office, studies carefully the Jewish practice and much that had been written regarding this by Protestants of various schools, and follows this with an examination of Matthew xviii. 17, Roman xii. 8, 1 Corinthians xii. 28, and 1 Timothy v. 17 with abundant references to a wide range of commentators. The Fathers are next called to witness and numerous relevant passages from the Reformers

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are noted. Gillespie proceeds to attack Field, and to correct Whitgift and Saravia, and then to argue that elders may vote in all Church courts; and finally he discusses ordination, which he regards as "a thing common both to preaching and ruling elders," admitting that imposition of hands is not practised in the case of ruling elders, but adding the important statement: "After the election of ruling elders, with the notice and consent of the whole Church, there followeth with us a public designation of the persons so elected, and an authoritative or potestative mission, ordination or deputation of them into their presbyterial functions, together with public exhortation with them, and prayer in the church for them, which we conceive to be all that belongeth either to the essence or integrity of ordination. I mean not to condemn imposition of hands, nor any other convenient sign in the ordination of ruling elders, only I intend to justify our own form as sufficient."

The second part of Gillespie's treatise deals with the Courts of the Church. In a postscript he takes up a series of objections that have been made to the eldership. One of these is the habit of having elders in office for a short period, and he states the position of the *Second Book of Discipline*. His opinion may be quoted: "The office of a ruling elder ought to be for his life no less than the pastor's, yet must we not condemn those churches which dispense with the intermission of their actual attendance for a certain space, and permit them to exercise their office by course, as the Levites did of old." Another interesting defence which he makes refers to the appointment of new elders



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by the old Session. He admits that the people have the right to elect, but is satisfied that they really do so when there is a proper establishment and when the officers for the time-being elect with the knowledge and consent of the Church and we know from another passage that tacit consent was all that he thought necessary. To leave matter to the "most voices of the people" would, he says be "a mere democracy with many moderators which is the most monstrous government that ever was heard of." This was in accordance with the mind of Calvin, who believed in a Church which had the right of excommunication, and which thus discriminated morally between classes of people. Calvin was not a democrat in any modern sense.

In the Cromwellian period the best discussion of the Eldership was that by James Guthrie of Stirling, a leading Protester, who at the Restoration suffered martyrdom for the political views expressed in his *Causes of God's Wrath* (1651). The *Treatise of Ruling Elders and Deacons* (1652), composed at the desire of the General Assembly, is a short document whose object was to raise the standard of piety and activity in the eldership. "It is more than manifest," says Guthrie, "that there is a generation of ignorant, slothful, earthly-minded men who bear the name of elders and deacons in many congregations, and where such bear rule, what can be expected but that the people should perish for want of knowledge, and holiness be despised and lye in the dust." He has the customary Bible and patristic references, and depends largely upon the *Second Book of Discipline*. The office to him is of divine institution, he accepts

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Calvin's view of 1 Timothy v. 17, and he emphasizes the importance and high seriousness of the work, and discusses the inward and outward call, election by minister and existing elders with approval of the congregation, and then trial and admission. The list of qualifications for the Eldership he takes chiefly from Timothy, but is careful to say that it is not requisite "to be endued with the gift of exhortation and instruction competent to the pastor." An elder's duties include those common to all Christians to exhort, rebuke, comfort, restore, reconcile, pray for the brethren and visit the sick and distressed. The elder must also assist to examine those who desire Communion. What seems to require more than private admonition must be reported to the Session. It is important that elders should be well acquainted with the condition of the members of the congregation. Elders have their duties on the higher courts of the Church, not excluding the handling of questions of Doctrine. The imposition of hands, and the pronouncing of sentence of excommunication and absolving of penitents belong to ministers only. The chief work of the elder concerns discipline, including self-discipline, and Guthrie points out that the sin of omission as well as the sin of commission must be censured, and mentions a number of the common offences. He describes the ordinary course of discipline as established under John Knox. The number of elders depends upon the size of congregations, their needs and the kind of men available. Guthrie objects to men of position being preferred, and insists that the office is for those spiritually qualified even if "of a mean



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condition in the world." He commends the division of parishes into convenient districts for purposes of supervision by elders. The remainder of the treatise deals briefly with the office of Deacon.

Samuel Rutherford in his *Due Right of Presbyteries* (1644), directed chiefly against Robinson of Leyden, the inspirer of the Pilgrim Fathers, has a section on Ruling Elders (dealing especially with the objections to Calvin's interpretation of 1 Timothy v. 17), and another on the authority of the Eldership, while there are numerous incidental allusions to the office throughout the large volume and in other works by the same writer. In the Preface to *Lex Rex* (1644) he says it is a "lie" to state that the Church of Scotland has "lay elders."

David Calderwood, who discusses the Ruling Elder incidentally in Chapter XII of his *Altare Damascenum* (1623), and David Dickson, in his *Expositio Analytica* (1647), take the same attitude towards the crucial verse in Timothy. Alexander Henderson, in his *Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (1641), merely makes a plain statement of Scottish practice, and James Durham, who was a genuine peacemaker, avoids controversial points, but in his *Treatise Concerning Scandal* (1650) reminds us that ruling elders share with ministers the duty of preventing and suppressing not merely scandalous living, but also corrupt doctrine. Robert Baillie has various references to the eldership, but perhaps the most interesting are to be found in his *Review of Bramhall's Faire Warning* (1649), where he discusses seriatim criti-

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isms and allegations of his Anglican opponent. In his *Dissuasive* (1645) Baillie says clearly that labouring in the word and doctrine is the character and specific difference of the pastor and doctor, whereby they are distinguished from the ruling elder." James Renwick, the Covenanter, when in exile about 1687 decided to select elders for his congregation. He and his friends consulted about the office and he has left us his views. They have no original feature, but show the firm conviction of the Covenanters in the divinity of the institution, and reject the name laic-elders as implying the Romish separation between clergy and laity. He finds some in his day "who call these only ruling elders who sit in Presbyteries, synods and General Assemblies, allowing others the name of elders, but not ruling elders," and he points out (as Guthrie had done) that of course every elder is a ruling elder. His statement generally is on the lines of Guthrie.

At the Westminster Assembly there was considerable controversy with regard to the Ruling elder. Baillie tells us how Henderson, Rutherford and Gillespie all "spoke exceeding well" in the debate. "There was no doubt," he says, "but we would have carried it by far most voices; yet because the opposites were men verie considerable, above all gracious and learned little Palmer, we agreed upon a Committee to satisfie, if it were possible, the dissenters. . . . All of them were ever willing to admitt elders in a prudentiall way; but this seemed a most dangerous and unhappie way, and therefore was peremptorlie rejected. We must to carie at last, with the contentment of



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sundrie once opposite and silence of all, their divyne and scripturall institution."

Most important evidence is provided by the *Diary* of Dr. John Lightfoot, who was a member of the Assembly. From this we learn the very great difficulty which the Assembly experienced with regard to the interpretation of 1 Timothy v. 17. No one had any doubts as to its application to those whom he frequently terms "preaching elders." And a Committee at an early stage went so far as to report its opinion "that, besides those presbiters which rule well and labour in the word and doctrine, there be other presbyters who especially apply themselves to ruling though they do not labour in the word and doctrine." Alexander Henderson in support of the ruling eldership pointed out that "however it be somewhat strange in England" it had been employed very successfully in Scotland, and at Geneva and even earlier—reference to the mistaken suppositions of the writers of the period as to the practice of the early Waldensians and Bohemians. Lightfoot says there were "very many and very long debates" on this verse from Timothy. Rutherford admitted that there were over a dozen possible interpretations and discussed the more plausible of them and George Gillespie supported him. The Scots opinion was so definite and the desire of the Assembly to accommodate them was so strong that the general opinion of the Assembly that "the New Testament hath no where distinguished the ruling elder's office," and that it was an invention of Calvin, led to postponement of any decision for some time. English opinion was influenced by the Independents

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and there had not in England been any experience of the ruling elder which compared with that of Scotland, though it must be remembered that Cartwright interprets 1 Timothy v. 17 as did the Scots and in his *Confutation of the Rhemists* refers to Bishops as "preaching elders." At Westminster it ultimately agreed that there were elders in the Jewish Church "joined to the priests and levites in the government of the Church." Agreement was also reached that ordination was to be only by "preaching presbyters." The final decision had, however, to be made at last as to whether the other presbyters were to be termed "ruling elders" or not. George Gillespie moved to this effect, but the majority were against him, and it was decided to denominate them simply "such as in the Reformed Churches are commonly called elders." The Assembly went the length of accepting the Eldership as "warranted" by Scripture, but it did not declare it to be prescribed by Scripture as essential to Church Government, and the proof-texts adopted did not include 1 Timothy v. 17, which to the Scots was the most important of all. The Scottish view had of course its English supporters, but the general position is indicated by the *Leads of Agreement* between Presbyterians and Congregationalists at London, proposed in 1645, where it is stated: "Whereas divers are of opinion that there is also the office of Ruling Elders who labour not in word and doctrine, and others think otherwise, we agree that this difference make no breach among us."

The Scots General Assembly in 1645 adopted the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government*



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in the Westminster terms. It did so explicitly in the interest of uniformity and there were no doubt many regrets with regard to details. There certainly were a number of things about all the Westminster documents which troubled the Scots and differences of opinion and of practice did not disappear when these had been accepted as a rule of the Church. In particular Gillespie's view of 1 Timothy v. 17 continued to have supporters especially in the Burgher and Antiburgher denominations of the eighteenth century and in the succeeding United Presbyterian Church. The expression "preaching elder" was used of ministers not only by Gillespie, Rutherford and Guthrie, but by the General Assembly of 1642, and we find it in Hume's *Admonition* of 1608.

The Scottish Episcopalian attitude to the Eldership is very interesting. There was no attempt to dispense with Sessions during the first Episcopate though other courts seem to have been more or less limited to ministers. The National Covenant found strong support amongst the laity, and elders in large numbers were sent to the Glasgow Assembly of 1638. This caused bitter attack against the eldership from the Episcopalians. More than one protest came from the clerics and the King's Commissioner summed up the opposition in his concluding statement. Gilbert Burnet in his *Vindication* (1673) goes over the ground once more. One of the objections John Row had made to the Canons of 1636 was the omission of any reference to ruling elders, and Gillespie in *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (1646) asserted that prelates "utterly denied" the office of ruling

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elders. Maxwell, Bishop of Ross, in his *Burden of Issachar* (1644) denounces the Session and its discipline, and it is clear that the thorough Episcopalian disliked the office, although in 1638 attention was confined to the particular use that was being made of elders at the time for voting purposes in the Church Courts.

One of the most illuminating illustrations of an Episcopalian attitude occurs in the unpublished *Spiritual Exercises* of John Forbes of Corse. The passage must be quoted fairly fully. "There was also amongst many other questions" (put to the Aberdeen Doctors at the General Assembly of 1640) "propound to us, if ye think the present assemblie a lawfull court of Christ agreeable to God's word? To this question I desyred my colleagues to answer affirmative, but some bodie being in company said that then they would bind us to acknowledge laick elders. Therefore we gave in writing this answer: *quoad indictionem et conuocationem affirmatur, de constitutione autem; quoad pastores, iidem affirmatur; seniores autem laices quod attinet, de eorum potestate deliberandum videtur.* Although these be sound and modest answers, yet fearing to seem too contentious and to irritate the Synod and the laick elders against us we changed them the next day. . . . Also in our second paper, to the question concerning the lawfulness of the assemblie, we answered affirmative, for we considered it was not convenient for us to waken the question concerning the power of laick elders, nor did we think the assemblie to be invalidat by their presence whatsoever were their power, and also by them we found no prejudice against ourselves or the cause



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wch we had in hand, seeing the pastors did allow the subscribing of the Covenant, so yt the matter was not overswayed by the voyces of the ruling laick elders, different from the voyces of pastors. And in my compearance before the Committee after the ingiveing of this second paper, being asked what I thought of the assemblie, answered, I think it a lawfull court of the Church as set down in the question. And again being asked concerning the laick elders therein, answered, I make no exception against anie member of the assemblie, nather laick nor cleric, but I do submitt myself unto them. Thus was I dismissed from yt Committee. And afterward, revolving what had passed, I perceive my own weakness both in casting in yt question concerning the laick elders unnecessarlie in the first paper, and also after the question was moved, in leaving it so slenderlie, for being asked concerning their power I think I ought to have answered at least, yt whatsoever may be thought of this order, yet they who plead most for it, do acknowledge yt the specific difference of pastors and of such sort of elders are yt the pastor's office is to labour in the word and doctrine ; but to sett judges and pronounce authoritatively *ex officio* concerning the word and doctrine and to prescribe to pastours what they shall teach and what they shall refute is to labour in the word and doctrine. Ergo this belongeth not *ex officio* to such elders."

Forbes in his *Instructiones* rejects Calvin's interpretation of 1 Timothy v. 17, but from the *Irenicus* we gather that he was not opposed to the existence of elders in the Church.

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At the Restoration there was at first the inclination to do away completely with elders, presbyteries and synods. Sessions and higher courts were suspended by Royal Command at the beginning of 1662, although it would appear (for example from the Ceres records) that elders continued to meet for the distribution of the poor money and must also have collected it. At Anstruther Easter the Session met for discipline and care of the poor regularly without intermission in 1662, and no one would imagine from the records of that parish that such a thing as a Privy Council existed, or that any change had taken place in Church government in Scotland. In the autumn of 1662 the various courts were allowed to resume their activities. Archbishop Leighton thought the discharging of Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries the first "unhappy stumble" of his Episcopalian friends at the Restoration, as it had the effect of "laying loose the reins of all discipline for ane whole year." At the same time we have to remember that one of McWard's chief objections to Leighton's own Accommodation was the absence of the ruling elder from the scheme.

Here and there we have traces of hesitation and opposition with respect to the Eldership. At South Ronaldshay (Orkney) we read on November 30th, 1662 : "The honest men who wer formerly elders appoynted to meet the minister upo Thursday," and then : "The minister did signify that thair former name of elders was now to be changed, and they desyned by the name of assistants for delating and censuring of offenders and concurring with the minister in the executione of the



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discipline of the Church ;" and again in April, 1663, the minutes say : " Those who formerly sate as elders . . . promised to be diligent and faithful as assistantes . . . the name or title of elder . . . a name properly belonging to preatching ministers only in all scripture." Later (1664, 1666 and 1668) we find them spoken of as " sessioners " and " members of the Sessione," but by 1680 all this had been forgotten and the convenient old name had returned to regular use.

" Sessioner " occurs at Anstruther Easter in 1673 and 1675, but " elders " in 1678, 1681, etc. At Airlie there was quite a deliberate attempt to abolish the old name, and those who assembled on November 28th, 1662, are called " assistants for discipline in ye Sessions of Airlie." The instructions issued by Aberdeen Synod in 1662 are that the minister should choose people for discipline supervision, but the actual word " elder " is not used. In the Synod minutes later, however (for example in 1674) one finds the word regularly.

And generally speaking elders, being needed, were permitted their old name as well as their old function. In January, 1663, Oldhamstocks minutes refer definitely to " the elders," and in 1664 " elders " are explicitly mentioned at Wick, Thurso, Watten, Canisbay, and indeed all over the country. At the close of the period elders were so much a part of the system of things that in 1694 the Town Council had great difficulty in stopping " the Episcopall sessione of this burgh " from officiating, pointing out that " they are not a legale sessione."

Not only did Kirk Sessions meet by instruction of the Bishops, but the Privy Council went out of

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its way to give powers to compel men to be elders where they showed reluctance to serve under the "curates." A Glasgow Town Council record of 1663 proposes punishment for refusal. In 1684 a further Act was required for the Covenanting districts. At Kilmacolm in 1686 a man is in trouble for declining to serve as an elder.

The theoretical objection still survived with Episcopalians, and Fountainhall, referring to the 1684 Act, says : " This was looked on as an Act not very consistent with Episcopacie, but rather peeking and declining to Presbyteriall government, whose invention Sessions and Presbyteries were." The Episcopalian clergy at Aberdeen in 1694, acting as a Presbytery, put the question : " Whether the annual office of ruling, not preaching, elders, chosen out among the people and joined with ministers in Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial and General Assemblies, and their Committees, to assist and concur with them in the exercise of discipline and government can be warrantably affirmed to be of divine institution, and if any footstep of such an office doth appear in the Church history, or if any plain convincing proof of its constitution can be produced out of Scriptures ; and if this office be not of divine institution, whether a judicatory consisting in part of such officers, pretending to divine institution, and to act by warrant and commission from Jesus Christ, be a lawful judicatory ? "

The writer of the *Inquiry into the Divine Right of Presbytery* (1704) follows much the same line. He compares the worldly wisdom and policy of the unjust steward commended in the Gospel with



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that of Presbyterians in "assuming lay elders into a share with them in the Government of the Church," but is positive there is no divine right about it, and no scriptural foundation, the annual appointment proving that it is only a human invention. He insists, however, that he is "no enemy to the office of laick elders, but look upon them as many ways usefull to the Church for advancing piety, suppressing vice and immoralities and preserving good order, and may be very helpfull to pastors by their information, by their advice and counsel, by their assistance and concurrence in the discharge of their ministrie and in the exercise of discipline." What he will not have is any meddling by laymen with "the power of the keys."

It is true that in certain parishes discipline does not seem to have been so rigidly administered in the Restoration period as it was before that. Sessions also seem here and there to have died out completely before the Revolution, so that in 1690 Dalserf (Lanarkshire) was unable to call a minister "for want of an eldership," while in June of that year there was certainly no Session at Perth and at Monzie (Perthshire) nine elders were ordained in 1691 and similarly elsewhere to form what seem entirely new Sessions.

On the other hand we find the eldership continuing under Scottish Episcopacy. Thus Alexander Lunan in his unpublished *Journal* refers to a meeting "with ye chief members and elders" of his Episcopalian meeting house at Blairdaff in 1730. In 1736 he writes: "In ye afternoone convened the elders, destribute some money to the poor, paid

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ye clerks and officers, and ordered payment to be made of the elements, etc." Discipline cases came before his Session as in 1738, and one is "absolved after paying something to be given to the poor." Additional elders were elected in this year and they took the oath *de fidei*. But we note that when another congregation near Brechin called him in 1744 they promised him "the double honour due to the sacred office, viz., Reverence and Maintenance," which shows an interpretation of 1 Timothy v. 17 that would not have pleased Calvin or Gillespie.

The controversies which troubled Scotland in the eighteenth century were first theological and then matters of Church and State; but the Secessions were in no case away from Presbyterianism, and the ecclesiastical system of Kirk Session and higher courts was regularly followed everywhere and stoutly maintained.

Overtures presented to the Assembly in 1705 show slight differences persisting in theory and practice. They recommend that deacons in the Sessions should vote "only in matters belonging to their own office," and they contain an interesting statement regarding the old custom of annual election: "Though an elder being once so ordained makes him to be so during life . . . yet where there are plenty of persons fit to be elders and plenty of elders, the actual exercise of the office . . . may be limited for a time and others take their turn. . . . Annual elections ought to be rectified, and that new elections of elders . . . should only be within the compass of four years, and that especially in burghs, where there are



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plenty of persons to choose upon." These overtures did not become law, but the practice of annual elections must have been very rare by this time and was certainly soon quite dead. It should be explained that it remained very popular abroad. Knox wished it so as to "suffer none to usurpe a perpetuall domination over the kirk," and later it was useful because so much was required of the elder that he could not be asked to do it all along with his proper work for more than a short period. *The Second Book of Discipline* declared the office to be *ad vitam*, but allowed that all need not serve simultaneously or continuously. At Kinghorn in 1642 in three cases "immunitie was granted for a year from the exercise of the office." Annual election was long the custom. We note it for example at St. Andrews 1600, Kirkcaldy 1618, Elgin 1619, Ceres 1646, Oldmachar 1652, Oldhamstocks 1658. Even in 1663 the Glasgow magistrates "deall with the ministers and present sessionne to mak choyse of ane new sessionne," those who refuse to act to be fined fifty pounds, and in addition twelve shillings for every day's absence without known excuse. Later allusions already quoted show that the eldership was regarded as an annual office till the beginning of the eighteenth century. Writing in 1714 John Anderson (*Defence*) expresses his belief in life appointment of elders, but acknowledges that "in some great towns they are relieved in course by others." The custom, however, had already been disappearing. As early as 1646 Robert Baillie (*Historical Vindication*) declares that "there is not in any congregation in Scotland which I know a yearly

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election of elders ; but in populous cities where the elders are many and diverse of them unable to attend that charge without the hurt to their estate, the most of them being merchants and tradesmen, who must travail for their livelihood, they have liberty to be free from that service every two years if so they be content to attend upon a call every third year." Finally, when the Synod of Orkney attempted to enforce the short period eldership, the General Assembly of 1718 had it sharply rebuked, insisting upon appointment *ad vitam*.

The whole general practice of the Church with regard to the eldership in the earlier part of the eighteenth century may be gathered from Steuart of Pardovan, from Adam Petrie's *Rules of Good Deportment for Church Officers* (1730) and from John Currie's *Vindication of the Real Principles of the Reformation* (1740).

It is interesting to note side by side at this period the two contrasting theories of the Westminster Assembly debates with regard to the nature of the Eldership. John Anderson accepts the Presbyterian theory, and while agreeing that "ruling elders are admitted by no such ceremony" as laying on of hands, expresses his own wish that this could be practised, though denying that it is "absolutely necessary." The office he holds to be of divine institution, having existed in the primitive church, but "through the pride of bishops" falling into desuetude having to be revived at the Reformation in "the best constituted churches in the world." On the other hand Robert Wodrow of Eastwood, in a sensible and fairminded letter to a friend in



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1710, assumes on Scriptural grounds that the ruling eldership was indeed instituted by Christ, but he is far from satisfied that 1 Timothy v. 17 can bear the weight of argument sometimes rested upon it. He regards the elders as representatives of the people assisting the pastors in the "ruling" part of their work. At the same time he is no democrat, being "as much afraid of popular supremacy and anarchy as of prelacy." Following Gillespie, he points out that all Christians have obligations to others by way of warning and even denunciation, and that elders naturally have this to a greater degree, which in a sense may be called the charge of souls, but he tends to minimise the distinction between elders and people and to make more of that between elders and pastors. David Williamson, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, preaching at the opening of the General Assembly of 1703, refuting the charge of clerical domination in Scotland, notes that "ministers do nothing alone, but with the people's representatives, the elders," which again suggests the lay theory. On the other hand Thomas Boston in the same period, preaching on "the duty of Ruling Elders," emphasizes the spiritual functions, visiting the sick, praying with them, rebuking, warning, comforting and instructing, but leaving such matters as the care of the finances to deacons appointed for the purpose. Reference should also be made to the writings of Thomas Forrester of St. Andrews, who in his *Rectius Instruendam* (1684), *Hierarchical Bishops' Claim* (1699), and later controversial tracts, upholds Calvin's interpretation of 1 Timothy v. 17, and defends Presbyterian practice against

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age and other English objectors. William Jameson, the blind lecturer in History at Glasgow, wavered in his views, but comes out in the end (*Cyprianus Iosotimus*, 1705) for the lay theory.

By the middle of the eighteenth century pretty considerable improvements had taken place in material conditions and standard of living, and a class of elder was produced who had more independence and more education. From the activities of these the Secession Churches profited, and it was in the Secession Churches that the authority of the elders approached most nearly to that of the minister. At an earlier period, whatever theory might approve itself to ecclesiastical writers, the minister was in simple fact on a different plane from his elders. His position in the parish was unique. By character, culture and even income he was a man apart. No elder would have dreamt of assuming spiritual equality with one who in other respects was so obviously his superior. But in the second half of the eighteenth century one finds intense interest among elders in matters ecclesiastical and even theological, while the building up of new congregations gave men position and called for initiative formerly unrequired, and the whole effect was to lessen the feeling of difference between minister and elder. In the minutes of Aberdeen Associate Church (now Melville) there is frequent reference to members joining or leaving for doctrinal reasons. Thus in 1760 an elder declared he could no longer keep Communion with that congregation "as no better than Papists and the whoor of Babalon:" he became a Glassite. Another elder in 1762 "imbibed independent



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principals." Such men were of a new type. The "praying societies" also gave scope for the gifts of certain of the spiritually minded, and the elder might in fact under the circumstances of the day attempt much that had been customarily the function only of the "preaching" or "teaching" elder. The Presbyterian theory of the eldership was thus general in the new denominations. In the Church of Scotland on the other hand the Kirk Session was not so active in the second half of the eighteenth century as it had been in earlier periods. The uninformative Session minutes seem to indicate relatively slight participation by elders in definitely religious work. The moderate would tend to the lay theory of the eldership, as for example does Principal George Campbell of Aberdeen.

The Presbyterian and Lay views are clearly distinguished in the nineteenth century. Lorimer (*Eldership of the Church of Scotland*, 1841) is strongly for the former, insisting that there is "no such office" as that of lay elder. "The office of elder is an ecclesiastical one. He who holds it ceases to be a layman." 1 Timothy v. 17 naturally appears to him fundamental. King (*The Ruling Eldership*, 1844) and McKerrow (*The Office of Ruling Elder*, 1846) adopt the same attitude, discussing at length the important text from Timothy. We find the view that was characteristic of the U.P. Church in Webster's *History of Kirkwall U.P. Congregation*: "Though the office of the eldership is but one, yet every elder is not necessarily competent to discharge all the duties of the one office. In apostolic times there were some elders

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who ruled well, others not so well, and others who not only ruled well, but who laboured also in word and doctrine. . . . These, by way of distinction, we designate the ministers of the Church." Woodside (*Soul of a Church*) informs us that in the U.P. Church "the distinction between clerical and lay was reduced almost to a minimum, and the teaching elder was no more than *primus inter pares*." Elders had the controlling voice in the Session, and numerically they were also stronger than ministers in Presbytery and Synod, while the rule which allowed Sessions to choose as their representative to the Synod any elder from any part of the church created a group of leading city elders who were sent every year and came to exercise powerful influence.

Witherow, an Irish Presbyterian, in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, April, 1873, claimed for the ruling elder "a complete equality in every way with the minister of the Word—the only distinction which is not otherwise than accidental and must often be non-existent, being distinction in special education and training." Dr. W. E. Moore of Columbus, Ohio, speaking at the Presbyterian Alliance conference at Edinburgh in 1877, affirmed "that the elder is of right a pastor and a teacher—if qualified by suitable gifts—as well as a ruler." And at the corresponding conference at Belfast in 1884, Dr. Chancellor of the R.P. Church in Ireland declared: "The elder is not a mere lay counsellor or assessor to the pastor in the court of judgment. He is joint-pastor and over-seer of the flock. The teacher has no superiority over the elders in matters of adminis-



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tration." W. M. Macphail (*The Presbyterian Church*, 1908) states that "the general view is that the ministry and eldership are one and the same office."

In the Welsh Calvinistic Church (now Presbyterian) the elder had something of the function of a local preacher and might be chairman in court of the Church. Similarly in New Zealand and Canada, where elders were employed to take a service or conduct a funeral when a minister was not available. The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and the Cumberland Church in U.S.A. have had an elder as Moderator of the highest court of the Church. Dr. Hall of New York, at the Presbyterian Alliance gathering in Belfast in 1884, protested against an elder who occupied the chair at one of the meetings having to call upon a minister to pronounce the benediction.

The Lay theory which seemed to prevail as a result of the Westminster Assembly flourished in the Episcopalian period which followed, and appears in the Presbyterian *Form of Process* of 1707—"the minister of the Word being an office above that of the ruling elder," etc.—and seems to be implied in the Act of Assembly, 1731 regarding election of ministers, where the elders are declared to represent the people.

In the nineteenth century it appeared prominently in discussions in the Church of Scotland Assemblies in the early 'seventies, and seems to have been generally but not unanimously held. Principal P. C. Campbell of Aberdeen had published in 1866 a small but very erudite book on *The Theory of Ruling Eldership*. He laid stress, not, like

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Calvin and Gillespie, upon 1 Timothy v. 17, but upon Romans xii. 8, where, he says, "the institution of lay church rulers . . . is maintained on solid and reasonable grounds of Scripture and expediency." The matter is pursued historically, biblical passages, the works of the Fathers, and the writings of the reformers, the Church of Scotland standards and continental opinion all coming under review. There is according to Campbell only one kind of order and he is a minister. The writer speaks with some contempt of the *Second Book of Discipline*, in which his opponents in part relied. He finds good support in Grotius, Blondell and Vitringa, and he quotes with approval Smyth of Charleston (*Presbytery and not Prelacy*, 1843): "The officers now called 'ruling elders' are still to be regarded as scriptural and proper. They are spoken of in Scripture, although not under the title of presbyters. Christ . . . delegated all power to the body of the church. But as all cannot be officers, and as all cannot meet to transact business, they must act by delegated officers, that is, by ruling elders, who are, as our standards teach, the representatives of the people." Campbell agrees with Smyth that there is no evidence to include the Presbyterian ruling elders under the Scripture presbyters, who are definitely ministers, and that the patristic witness provides us with *seniores plebis* and not presbyters in the Scripture sense. Campbell objects to the term "ordination" in connection with the admission of elders as "inconsistent with the true view of their position as *seniores plebis*, the representatives of the unordained members of the Church distinct from its professional functionaries."



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The Church of Scotland Committee which investigated the matter reported in 1873 that the Presbyterian theory "has never been carried out in any branch of the Reformed Church," and Sprott (*Book of Common Order*, 1901), referring to the *Second Book of Discipline* declares: "The 'elder' as described in it never existed in the Church. Common opinion seems to express itself in the words of J. A. Campbell of Stracathro, a Church of Scotland elder, at Belfast in 1884: "Whatever may be the exact theory of his office, to the people the ruling elder is one of themselves. He is in true sense a layman, having the same life in the world to lead, the same worldly employments to occupy him and the same kind of difficulties and trials to meet. A Christian interest shown by the elder must come home to the people as something which in a sense speaks to them more directly because shown by one who is a layman like themselves." J. A. Hodge (*What is Presbyterian Law* 1882) gives the American opinion that in the Church of Scotland generally minister and elder were regarded as distinct offices, requiring different qualifications, chosen by different bodies, ordained by different processes, subject to distinct authorities, elders unable to ordain ministers or administer sacraments, and, if they wished to do so, requiring to be re-ordained. C. L. Warr (*The Presbyterian Tradition*, 1933) seems to assume that the latter theory is the only really characteristic Scottish view.

Those who to-day hold the Presbyterian theory do so in the sense in which it was put forward by George Gillespie. It would be possible to

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interpret it rather differently, and this has sometimes been done. Ministers and elders might together be classed as "clergy," members of a priestly order which by ordination and a special act of grace is miraculously separated from the rest of mankind. Lorimer definitely puts it so strongly as that when a man becomes an elder he ceases to be a layman. But the Presbyterian theory as popular to-day, especially amongst those with Secession affinities, regard minister and elder as classed together, not because both are "clergy" but because neither is "clergy," though they have closely allied spiritual functions, for which God has given them the gift and for which the Church has set them apart, by virtue of all which they are separated from the other members of the Church. Calvin and Knox had laid small stress upon the ceremony of ordination and agreed to it with apparently little enthusiasm, fearing the superstitious abuse of such rites. Ordination to Gillespie was definitely not a sacrament, and did not convey Grace but gave recognition to its presence, being merely a convenient and impressive ceremonial, which might very well be employed in the case of both minister and elder. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers dominated the position.

But this view, after all, differs little from the lay theory as understood by many—though not all. The only practical difference between these upholders of apparently contradictory views is in the degree of separation which they believe ought to be recognised between minister and elder on account of difference of function. Some who accept the lay theory of the eldership are merely of opinion



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that the work assigned to the two offices is so very distinct that it is absurd to try to include them under one title. They would (unlike the others) put no weight upon 1 Timothy v. 17. Their attitude might bluntly be expressed (using popular and perhaps not very apt phraseology) as viewing the minister as a professional and the elder as an amateur, the former being paid and giving his whole time, while the latter is unpaid and serves only part-time, the former wearing a uniform of sorts, preaching, celebrating the sacraments, solemnizing marriages, taking part in ordinations, presiding at Session meetings, subject to Presbytery and distinct from Session supervision, and having a constant seat in Presbytery and Synod, while the latter is without those rights and duties, and acts very much like a member of any secular executive committee. The difference here is again only in the function for which the individual is set apart and again the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is dominant. Anything that might be interpreted as "magic" is cut out. But the minister is given more decided superiority in spiritual matters than upon the other view. His gift is different, and it would be natural to have somewhat different ceremony of initiation for him from that prescribed for elders. Thus the laying on of hands may reasonably be reserved for ministers as has been the general practice of the Church.

But the lay theory has been most strongly advocated from a very different standpoint, and for very different reasons. There are those in Scotland who like Romanists and Anglo-Catholics regard ministers as priests, endowed by Christ

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at ordination with special Grace, which makes them the exclusive mediators of salvation. They hold (as did Robert Baillie against the Independents) that Church Government is in the hands of the officers of the Church and not of the members, but with them these Church officers are the fully ordained clergy, and all others, including elders are "mere" laymen. They do not agree to the doctrine which confines the power of ordination to monarchical bishops, for as Presbyterians they maintain that the scriptural bishop and presbyter are one Order, that the Presbyter's office alone is essential and that the Presbyterian succession is perfectly valid and warranted by the practice and theory of the ancient Church.

But the elder as a "mere" layman is not "ordained" in any full sense of the word. His function is regulative and administrative. It would according to this view be perhaps permissible even to have women elders, for this would in no way affect the question of women and the ministry. Indeed their admission to the eldership might be useful to emphasize the gulf between the ordained and unordained and ultimately protect the ministry against invasion. The usefulness of the elder is of course not questioned, nor is the right of any layman to co-operate in the life of the Church. But the elder is simply a layman representing other laymen.

No doubt views varying from these or even combining them may also be found. It is clear that in the present Church of Scotland there is certainly not the unity of outlook with regard to the nature of the eldership which might be desired.



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Fortunately within a national Church there ought to be room for considerable differences of opinion. Uniformity and unity must always be carefully distinguished.

A smaller divergence of views to which attention may also be called concerns the method by which elders are selected.

Technically the choice of elders has always been with the congregation, but the interpretation of this has shown development. The Order for the election of elders in use at Edinburgh at the Reformation gave the Session the duty of selecting a number of names from which the congregation chose half to be elders. This Order was generally confirmed by the Assembly of 1582. According to the *Second Book of Discipline* the Session nominate and the people approve. The names of those proposed were always brought before the congregation in order that any objection might be brought forward. Lorimer, quoting the *Presbyterian Review*, 1834, makes a vain attempt to insist that there was real popular election in the seventeenth century.

The actual conditions were quite in accordance with the mind of Calvin, who, judged by modern standards, was in many respects far from democratic. Baillie in his *Dissuasive* declared "popular government bringeth in confusion, making the feet above the head." And in 1673 Gilbert Burnet's *Vindication* stressed the fact that in Scotland all ministers were in Presbyteries, but only one elder for each Session, and that in the Assembly there were three ministers to one elder—which was scarcely democratic. Everybody, how-

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ever, was satisfied that the people's rights were amply preserved when the Session elected.

In 1642 the Assembly stated the rule that the old Session should elect the new both in town and country, always of course with the consent of the people. It should be remembered that in the seventeenth century (and in many burghs since 1469) the magistrates had habitually nominated their successors. The same custom was followed in the churches of Strassburg, France and Holland. The Oldhamstocks records note that in 1642 "the old Session did nominent ane leit of thees yt was to be on the new." At Oldmachar in 1652 we find the old Session proceeding to choose the new, "this day being the electione day of elders." In Aberdeen the elders were elected from Michaelmas to Michaelmas, being chosen "be the Sessione of the preceeding years." They appeared before the pulpit and "did hold up their hands and gave their oaths *de fidei administratione*" as was the regular practice.

Additions to the Session were made in the same way. At Yester in 1654 the minister asked the elders to name "some honest men within the paroch" to be added to the Session. So at Elgin in 1658. The Anstruther Easter Session in 1656 "convened in ye ordinarie place of meeting and after prayer admitted Sr Philip Anstruther off yt ilk, knight, to ye eldership, who promissed fidelitie in ye sd office;" and in 1669 another in that parish was "admitted ane elder and promised fidelitie in collecting the poor ther money and diligence in searching of and delating scandals." On these occasions the congregation apparently



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was not present, though the regular edicts with regard to objections had been submitted ; but clearly it was more usual to admit elders publicly before the congregation, as for example at Yester in 1683. Nevertheless, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth elders at Oldmachar were regularly admitted simply at a Session meeting.

In burghs the Councils at an early stage had the chief say in electing elders as they had in all church affairs. The bailies, council and community of Peebles in 1562 elected a Session. At Edinburgh in 1584 the Town Council decided that elders were to be chosen by the provost, bailies, council, and deacons of crafts with advice of the ministers, and they proceeded to make a selection and sent the names to the ministers to intimate with a view to possible objections. In 1642 it was still the custom for the Glasgow magistrates to elect the Session. In 1693 the Town Council of Stirling is nominating elders, "it haveing bein the constant and undoubted right of the magistrates to give in the list of the elders to the Presbyteries." Aberdeen Town Council in 1694 officially approved of an intimation in church "for the electione of ane new Sessione."

In November, 1689, there being no Session at Logie (near Stirling) the heads of families made out a list and the minister of a neighbouring parish with some of his elders was sent by the Presbyter to examine the nominees. Something like this was the ordinary practice where a completely new Session was required. After the Revolution, where no Session was in being (as at Banff in 1694) a meeting of ministers, heritors and masters of

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families was held and a list of possible elders composed. At Yester in 1700 the heritors and householders "made a list of those to be elders," ten of these "being old elders" and thirteen "new nominat." Of these ultimately nine were ordained, both old and new elders being admitted with exactly the same form. At a later period elders once ordained were not reordained (as, for example, in Aberdeen Associate Church in 1776). The service at the admission of deacons was precisely the same, as is clear from the Yester record of 1650.

A full account of a typical ordination of elders may be given from the Session records of Dalmellington, December, 1700. "The which day the mini<sup>r</sup> preached from first Timothy 5 chap: and 17 v. anent the dwties of elders and people to them. After sermon was ended in the forenoon the mini<sup>r</sup> did show to the people that he was going about to ordain some more elders to them, and told them of all the orderly steps which they have taken preparatory and that now nothing impedeth his going one. Then the mini<sup>r</sup> called up the persons by name, and they standing in a conspicuous place were interrogat concerning their orthodoxy and were taken solemnly engaged to adhere to, own and maintain the doctrine, worship and government of this church and to lay themselves out both by their example and in the office of elders to suppress vice and cherish piety and exerce discipline faithfully and dilligently, and they still standing up, the minister by solemn prayer set them apart *in verbis de presenti*. After prayer the mini<sup>r</sup> spake to them as elders, encouraging ym to faithfulness and



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threatning if neglegent, and then directed a word of exhortation to the people shewing them their duty to the elders and exhorting them to obedience in the Lord."

The account given of an ordination at Oldhamstocks in 1719 is very similar. "This day the minister proceeded to ordain the above nominate elders after that he had preacht from 1 Tim. 5. 17. After sermon and prayer, having called them up, he breefly resumed to them their work and took them engaged to be faithfull in the discharge of the samin and exhorted the people to give them all due respect and then concluded with prayer and singing of psalms. After sermon, the Session having met and prayers said, the minister with those who formerly were elders took the new elected ones by the hand and desired them to take their places. They agreed that two and two of their number should gather the offering each Sabbath by turns. Also that one should go through the toun now and then in time of divine service to viue the houses thereof whither there were any that keep from church to profain the Lord's day."

Laying-on of hands was not used. Sage, the Episcopalian, writing at the end of the seventeenth century, says : "The whole nation knows no such things as either trial, fasting or imposition of hands are used by our present Presbyterians in the ordination of ruling elders." There had indeed been attempts in France to introduce it, so that the Synod of Gap in 1603 had to forbid the practice. Gillespie would have liked it, and so also the Dutch Koelman, though all admit it is not in use,

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and that it is certainly not essential. In Scotland laying-on of hands eventually did creep into use under the Secessions. Thus at Savoch United Secession Church in 1837, and at the same church (by that time U.P.) in 1857, elders were set apart by the laying-on of the hands of elders. King favoured the ordination of elders by the laying-on of hands, and so did the American Dr. Miller of Princeton, and it has been practised by some in the Irish Presbyterian Church, as well as by the R.P. Church and by some of the Presbyterian churches of the United States. The United Presbyterian *Rules and Forms of Procedure* does not mention imposition of hands in connection with elders, but in that Church there was even a body of opinion in favour of elders uniting with ministers in the ordination of ministers by the laying-on of hands, though this had no support in the practice of any reformed Church, and the Synod eventually decided against it. The new United Free Church (which is largely United Presbyterian) insists—according to James Barr (*United Free Church of Scotland*, 1934)—upon the parity of the teaching and the ruling elder, ordination by laying-on of hands being applicable to both and to be practised by both alike, ordination being “a recognition of gifts and a reception into office, not any mysterious conveyance of grace.”

From 1700 ruling elders at ordination had to sign the Confession of Faith. In 1865 a first move was made by some elders of the Church of Scotland to have the formula relaxed. It was felt that the theological requirements worried men who were asked to become elders. Ultimately



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an extremely vague formula was devised and accepted and is in use in the united Church. This is a great departure from what we find for example in the early Secession Churches. Small, in his account of Townhead Secession Church, Alloa, reports that candidates for the eldership in 1750 were asked if they observed family worship, if they were members of a Praying Society, and if they would embrace the first opportunity of entering into the bond for renewing the Covenants. One of those proposed at this date was reported to have given offence two years before "by buying a halfpenny worth of snuff on the sacred day : " he was rebuked and his ordination delayed. The standard of requirement in the Secession Churches is also shown by the minutes of the Aberdeen Associate Church, where in 1776 a nominee was objected to because being "servant to a merchant " he could not attend week-day sermon : the objection was sustained.

Selection by the Session did not always introduce the best, and Wodrow complains in 1727 about the admission to the Cullen Kirk Session of George Ogilvy, younger son of the Chancellor Earl, about whose character there were misgivings. "Where are we going," he says, "when Sessions and Presbyteries are thus made tools of to bestow the elder's office to please great folk ? . . . If some timely remedy be not provided against their villainies in the choice of elders we must soon sink in our reputation and our judicatories will be totally corrupted."

Dunfermline Session in 1733 definitely consulted public opinion with respect to those whom they

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proposed to elect elders. But the idea of popular election really came in with the Secessions. Currie of Kinglassie, a Church of Scotland minister, had attempted something approaching popular election before 1740. In 1761 Aberdeen Associate Church minutes that "this congregation knows that the right of election belongs to such as are in full communion with us." In the Church of Scotland some of the Evangelicals favoured popular election, and Lorimer devotes a chapter in his *Eldership of the Church of Scotland* to advocating the method. It had been definitely rejected by Assembly a few years previously, but in 1842 it was carried, and it became the rule in the Free Church. At Urquhart Free Church in 1845 elders were elected at a meeting of male communicants and male heads of families. At Raasay Free Church in 1872 the congregation voted, and those with the highest votes were declared "thereby duly elected." After the Disruption there was a reaction in the Church of Scotland and the recent Act was annulled. At Banff in 1845 the Act was nevertheless made the basis of an election of elders, the Session selecting from those put forward by vote of the congregation. The former custom, however, was soon restored and at Banff in 1863 the minute reads : "The Session request the minister to apply to some of the most respectable members of the congregation whom he and they consider fittest for the office of elder, with a view to induce them to accept office." An overture in favour of popular election came before the Assembly of 1870 and was discussed for some years, the result being to encourage the Sessions to



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consult the people while retaining the authority. At Oldmachar in 1872 the male communicants were asked to give in sealed lists of persons deemed fitted, to the number of at least six. Seventy names were proposed by forty people. The fourteen with the highest votes were invited to be elders, but only four accepted. Finally eight new elders were actually ordained. In the united Church of Scotland the two methods—election by the Session and election by popular vote—are both allowable. The regulations are stated by Cox (*Practice and Procedure*, 1934).

It is desirable that there should be uniformity of method, but apparently the ideal arrangement has not yet been devised. The best method may produce unsatisfactory results, and no method is so bad that it may not effect a good appointment. Popular election is usual. The method has become fashionable in most departments of public life, though it cannot be said to be honoured to-day with such devotion as it received a few years ago. Even popular election of a minister is much less of a reality in most congregations now than it used to be. To leave the election of elders practically to the congregation has sometimes unfortunate consequences. Only a small section of the congregation vote. The mind of the people may not really be expressed. Men may be thrust forward by friends: there may even be something approaching to canvassing. The bulk of a congregation may not personally be acquainted with certain very fit persons who are not of a pushing type. The idea which many of the people have of the kind of man suitable for the eldership may not be very

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enlightened. It is also difficult in a merely popular election to keep any balance as to age, district of residence, class, interest in particular organisations—which are matters that might very reasonably influence the choice on a given occasion. On the other hand to accept the popular vote does put the responsibility upon the congregation, gives the members a sense of duty and privilege, and reduces the possibility of discontent. It offers a challenge to those nominated and is perhaps the method which gives the strongest encouragement to accept office. It is easier for all concerned. Even where Sessions retain the right to elect they seem now generally to invite suggestions and to make some attempt at combining the advantages of both methods.

Controversy has thus been very active with regard to the precise relation of the ruling elder on the one hand to the minister and on the other to the congregation. Much of the discussion seems to us beside the mark, assuming a view of the Bible and asserting an intolerant theory of divine right which are now alike unacceptable.

But controversy leaves us with an office that has developed in useful directions from Old and New Testament antecedents, with interesting encouragement from Early Church History, owing a special debt to Calvin, but showing itself a living institution by its capacity for adaptation to changing circumstances, and justifying itself in action.



## VII

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE Nineteenth Century—the “Wonderful Century”—witnessed unprecedented advance on many fronts. Railways and steamships, with all that they meant in the way of bringing people together and unifying the world and encouraging commerce between towns and cities with their industries and factories, water, lighting, transport, hospitals, schools, police, slums, taxes ; telegraphs and telephones ; newspapers and cheap literature resulting from new educational and other developments ; medical and surgical progress forced on by dangerous living and pampered bodies ; physical science with something fresh every morning ; the Copernican revolution of Darwin with the allied Hegelian idealism ; democracy triumphant, high day of Liberalism and Free Trade, the beginnings of Socialism and Trade Unionism ; great strides in municipal development ; History, Psychology, Economics, Sociology becoming sciences ; Victorian comfort and conventionality, propriety and orthodoxy, and at the same time the appearance of the respectable non-Christian and the non-Christian working man ; Wordsworth and Scott, and then Tennyson, Browning and Carlyle ; the sentimentalism of Dickens, the new paganism of Swinburne ; and in the religious sphere the Oxford Movement,

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the Disruption, Coleridge and F. D. Maurice, Missionary expansion, the earlier Biblical Criticism, the conflict between Science and Religion, new German influences in Theology.

At the beginning of the century religious life had grown extremely formal and uninspired. Sir Alexander Boswell does indeed compare it favourably with what went before as being more cheerful and less rancorous, but the first quarter of the century was unquestionably dull, wars and famines and unemployment no doubt contributing to spiritual depression. Then, however, we have the evangelical revival affecting many parts of Europe besides Scotland. The Disruption undoubtedly marked a high point of ecclesiastical enthusiasm, and it meant spiritual advance, stimulating the zeal not only of those who went out but of those who stayed in. The unfortunate bitterness associated with the movement astonishes us now. It made what we trust has been its last appearance in the Disestablishment campaign towards the close of the century.

Nineteenth century Scotland as a whole was very loyal in its churchmanship, a high value attaching to respectability, and there proved to be room side by side for three thriving denominations, all accepting the same creeds and confessions, the same system of Church government, and the same general practice in worship. The United Presbyterian Church assembled in 1847 was democratic, but not exactly of the people, for it depended to a considerable extent upon burghesses who had made good in business and who were gratefully liberal, and the Voluntary Principle, which had been



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unknown to the first Seceders, was greatly stimulated by the unusual ability of its supporters to practise it. The Free Church came by experience to appreciate quite as freely the blessings of independence and responsibility, and this made the Union of 1900 possible. The Church of Scotland, through its endowments and parochial system, was able to hold out the benefits of Christian ordinances to all, whether they wanted them or not, whether they could pay for them or not, and to maintain the place of religion in public and national life and to prevent complete transformation of Church into sect. The rivalry of the three churches animated their activities, and the country became lavishly churchied while, under the suggestion of the new commercial knowledge of the world, foreign mission work also strikingly developed.

At the same time the century is notable for the process of secularisation. This was due in part to altered social conditions, the advance of democracy, and the awakening of a new sense of the meaning of government and communal responsibility. But withal the prosperity of organised Christianity awakened keener opposition to the Church, and introduced secularisation schemes, which were facilitated by the divided state of the religious forces, and the mutual suspicions and jealousies amongst the denominations, and the non-existence of a truly national Church. Thus during the century the Church lost control of Poor Relief, of University and general education, and of social discipline, which had since the Reformation been regarded as integral and important provinces of ecclesiastical activity.

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The condition of the Eldership early in the century does not seem to have been very healthy. David Dickson (*The Elder and his Work*, 1886) suggests that in the Church of Scotland of those days the office might have died out altogether had it not been essential for position in the General Assembly. Lorimer, writing in 1841, refers to the decline and points out that the spiritual character of the duties calls for a strong measure of religion and assumes a considerable choice of superior religious men "and this, where religion is not flourishing, is not always to be had." In the same year Dunipace parish reported that "here, as elsewhere, there is an unwillingness to accept of that office." The advertisement of the Prize Competition in 1844, which was won by Dr. McKerrow's *Office of Ruling Elder*, states that the inefficiency of the Church "may be traced in no small degree to the imperfect manner in which in very many cases the duties of the ruling elder have been discharged." The Competition had the purpose of "turning the attention of the Churches to this important subject."

One discovers from the Church of Scotland records cases where Sessions appear to have had no meetings for some years. In 1825 the General Assembly found many parishes with no Session meetings and practically no elders, and Presbyteries were exhorted "to use their best and most prudent endeavours" to have this remedied. From the *New Statistical Account* we learn that Dalserf had no regular Session "for nearly fifty years preceding 1812." Ballingry seems to have had practically no Session during the first half of the nineteenth



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century. Everywhere the regular meetings for discipline had been abandoned, and occasional meetings were sufficient for other purposes. Representatives to Presbytery and Synod were mostly not appointed or did not attend until the controversies which led to the Disruption roused the country to fresh interest in ecclesiastical matters. The Presbytery of St. Andrews in 1830 recommended ministers to see that elders were appointed to attend the Higher Courts.

Reviving interest is shown by minutes of Session at Anstruther Easter in 1836, where we find the work of visiting in districts resumed by the elders, and new resolves made with regard to the discipline of those desiring Communion. Similarly at Aberdeen in 1838 a resolution of Presbytery was passed to the effect that Kirk Sessions are "in existence for the purpose of advancing in every Scriptural way the religious and moral well being of the parish" and that consequently Session Records should be more than lists of Discipline cases and should give an account of parochial activities, public intimations, the minister's texts, etc., at the same time reminding elders that they must be faithful in church attendance, Sabbath observance, family worship and school visitation. Kilsyth reported for the *New Statistical Account* that "the parish has long been divided into sixteen parts, over each of which an elder, who is at the same time deacon, presides. Most of the elders are attentive to the spiritual as well as the temporal affairs of their district or quarter, and are often found praying with the afflicted." In connection with the Antiburgher congregation at Kirkwall

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a very interesting "charge to elders" was minuted in 1828 showing a high standard of requirement, though in 1830 the Session here is found calling the attention of the Presbytery to the inefficient manner in which the duties of the eldership generally are being discharged. Acts passed by the Free Church in the early years of its existence reveal the measure of expectation there with respect to the Eldership. Dr. King's *Ruling Eldership of the Christian Church* and Dr. McKerrow's *Office of Ruling Elder* show the exalted views prevailing in the Secession Churches with regard to the history, duties and qualifications of the office, and Lorimer's *Eldership of the Church of Scotland* speaks in a similar way for the pre-Disruption Evangelicals.

Other writings which indicate the general recognition of the elder's importance include the various legal volumes of the Churches such as Forbes, *Digest of Rules and Procedure of the Free Church* (1856); *Rules and Forms of Procedure of the United Presbyterian Church* (1883); Mair, *Digest of Laws . . . of the Church of Scotland* (1887); and the works of Alexander and George Hill, T. J. Crawford, Bannerman, "A Member of the College of Justice," Principal P. C. Campbell. Americans, including Miller of Princeton, Smyth and Hodge, have made contributions. In Holland, in succession to the major classic of Voetius and the minor classic of Koelman, the nineteenth century produced H. Höveker, G. J. Vos, W. de Jong, H. Bouwman, while the present rules may be gathered from the regularly published *Reglementen der N. Hervormde Kerk*. The facts as far as



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modern France is concerned may be found in A. Lods, *Traité de l'administration des cultes protestants*.

In the latter part of the century there is abundant testimony that though the duties of the Scottish elder were not in detail what they had once been, the emphasis had come to be laid more upon the spiritual function and less upon the merely administrative. The elder was everywhere respected and election to the eldership was regarded as a high honour. Dr. Charteris has generously recorded how in his early ministry he was sustained in all his work by three faithful elders, "wise counsellors of a young minister in every difficulty and always willing to share his responsibility," and he declares : "It is not possible to over-estimate the effect of this constant upholding by the elders." And Norman Macleod of the Barony never forgot the cheering effect produced by an address of confidence in him from his Kirk Session at a time when he stood rather alone in the matter of Sabbath observance. Dr. James Cooper in the East Church of Aberdeen had trouble with elders who led a movement in defence of the traditional Scottish practices in worship, but in his Moderatorial address he was nevertheless prepared to state that the eldership "has supplied our Scottish Presbyterianism with a form of lay representation in the government of the Church perhaps the best to be found anywhere." And the height to which honour of the office could rise is revealed by Lady Grisell Baillie's words with reference to the admission of her brother to the eldership in 1854 : "His *was* an ordination. If his mother's eyes and mine had been opened,

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we would have seen the spirit of God descend like a dove and light upon him."

It must not be forgotten, however, how very much reduced in extent was the field of service left to the elders of the Church of Scotland. By the Poor Law of 1845 very great changes were made in the whole matter of poor relief. Only in rural parishes where no assessment had been made did the heritors and Kirk Session continue to administer the funds, and here the church door collections were still supposed to suffice, or almost to suffice, for this purpose. Thus at Ballingry, Airlie, and Balmerino the Session was the local authority for Poor Relief till 1894. Where assessments had been customary a new Parochial Board, including representatives of Kirk Sessions, assumed responsibility, as for example at St. Ninian's (Stirlingshire), where a regular assessment had been made since 1774, and at Rattray (Perthshire), where a similar arrangement began in 1775. Burghs (where the work had been shared by Town Councils and Kirk Sessions) had now a Parochial Board, and the voluntary system was abandoned. Session representation ceased in 1894, when Parish Councils were instituted. Nor have elders as such any connection with the present Public Assistance Committees of Town or County Councils.

According to Law, Sessions were for long not allowed to divert the church door collections to other purposes than poor relief, but in fact the collections were largely diverted, and now they may lawfully be applied to most congregational and Session purposes. Anstruther Easter Kirk Session in 1845 minuted that "all collections made



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at the church doors since the parochial board was formed be reserved in the hands of the Kirk Session, but a very similar decision is recorded in 1868 and so perhaps the first had not been effective. Banff Session intimated that the usual collection in the Church would now cease since an assessment was being imposed, but those who still wished to give to the poor might do so at the church door. Presently (because of thefts) they substituted a locked box for the basins formerly in use. Regular collections were now made for congregational purposes, church schemes, etc. At Keith the Session ordered plates to be set at the doors for collecting on behalf of the poor not included under the law, amongst these being the unemployed that is, the able-bodied poor who were never allowed for by Scottish Poor Regulations. The minutes of Daviot Session (Aberdeenshire) in 1846 and later record regularly the permission of the Parochial Board to the Session to distribute in a certain manner amongst the poor of the parish. Oxnam Session in 1860 "resolved that after payment of the Session Clerk and Church officer's fees the balance of the ordinary church door collections be devoted at the close of each year to such purposes as the Session may decide." *Quoad sacra* parishes were entirely free from the 1845 Act, as they had been from earlier poor law responsibility, and we find Gilcomston Session (Aberdeen) in 1870 deciding that the collections at Communion be given to poor communicants not receiving parochial relief, and the managers of the church objecting to this diversion of what would doubtless be unusually large collections from other congrega-

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onal purposes. Certain mortifications remained under Sessional administration, and Sessions have never ceased to care for such of the poor as were not eligible for or willing to accept parochial relief, and there were many who before the institution of recent pension and health and unemployment insurance schemes were practically dependent upon voluntary assistance such as the Church could provide.

Collections after the Poor Law Act were very small. At Cambuslang before the Disruption the minister complained that scarcely one-half of those who attended church put anything in the plate. Had money continued to be given: we hear of it at Cullen in 1800, and close by at Fordyce in 1842. There was also a growing opinion that it was the duty of the heritors to keep the poor, and that any deficiency would come from them, and so that it was simply throwing away money for ordinary church members to contribute anything. The *New Statistical Account* notes such feelings at Dinghorne, Markinch, Orwell (Kinross), Kirkmahoe (Dumfries). After the 1845 Act it was natural that people should see little cause for voluntary contributions for the poor, and it has always remained difficult to persuade people that churches in the changed conditions require more rather than less in the way of financial support.

We must note what led to the abandonment of the voluntary system of maintaining the poor. For centuries the Church through the alms of the faithful, through bequests, through local funds, and sometimes with the help of voluntary assess-  
ments among the heritors, had on the whole been



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able to meet the situation. But the Industrial Revolution had driven the population into towns, the Napoleonic Wars had increased the number of unemployed, disabled, orphans and otherwise dependent persons, the growth of the Secession Churches and finally the emergence of the Free Church, deprived the Session of the charities of a large section of the community, and the new view of the rights of man gave the public a more sensitive conscience regarding the poor and gave the poor a stronger sense of their claim upon society.

In many country places no special need of changing the law was admitted. Ministers as a rule held out for the old system to which they had been accustomed, and which associated personal interest and spiritual supervision with poor relief. Miss Atkinson (*Local Government in Scotland*) somewhat crudely suggests that ministers "were loath to be deprived of the importance and patronage" involved in the old procedure. But the statement from Balfron (Dunbartonshire) in the *New Statistical Account* shows better what was in their minds. "Previous to the year 1832 the poor and parochial funds were managed by the Kirk Session. The heritors met twice a year with the Session to docquet accounts, and to receive their report of the state of the poor ; but the whole of the active management devolved upon the Session. Nor did they discharge their duties in a perfunctory manner. Besides exercising a minute and daily care over all the paupers on the roll, on the first Monday of every month the ministers and Kirk Session met, when all the paupers who could attend were expected to make their appearance

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and personally to receive their monthly allowance. Those who could not appear from ill health were waited upon by some member of the Session, and their condition reported. Thus was the case of every individual brought monthly under the view of the whole Session." In 1832 the care of the poor was surrendered to the heritors, and "all the evils of a compulsory assessment" experienced. "Of all the public funds in Europe, none is managed with so little expense to the fund itself, none so frugally, none so impartially, and none is laid out more to the purpose for which they were raised, than the poor's funds under the care of the Kirk Sessions of Scotland. And never perhaps will Scotland find a more proper jury to determine the objects of public charity nor the quantum necessary for the supply."

Numerous other reports in the same volumes indicate a strong conviction that the former provision was sufficient. Carmunnock (Lanarkshire) states: "We have no assessment, nor is there any prospect of one ever being required." Kinnaird (Perthshire), Kirkconnel (Dumfries), Old Luce (Wigton) and many others say the same. Port Glasgow shows that apart from trifling mortifications, proclamation fees and mortcloth dues, all that is required "is contributed by voluntary collections at the doors of the church."

There is frequent complaint (as from Burntisland (Fife), Cromarty, and Kirkmichael (Dumfries)) that the old Scottish spirit of independence is disappearing under the assessment system. Lasswade (East Lothian) points out that an assessment "never fails to increase the number of claimants."



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But there are many parishes which while disliking the legal assessment are obliged to admit that it is inevitable under the new conditions. Arngask (Perth) in 1842 is still hopeful of "warding off legal assessment." But in the same county Aberdalgie reports that "the church collections are quite inadequate for their maintenance." Logie Easter (Ross-shire) reports in similar terms. Some parishes had a legal assessment much earlier. Kinnoull (Perthshire) began in 1823, but later in 1831 an attempt was made to go back to voluntary assessment. Crieff had a voluntary assessment from 1819, but some did not act fairly by the scheme and in 1838 we are told that the parish is "on the verge of a legal assessment."

In 1813 Oldmachar Session states that the collections "fall far short of affording the means of effectually relieving the exigencies of the poor," pointing out that people who attend churches other than the parish church are giving nothing to the parish poor. The situation was so bad that in the previous year the Session was obliged to permit certain people whose house had been burned to beg for four weeks through the parish. Campbelltown at the close of the previous century complained that the Relief congregation "who are among the ablest of the common people, keep their collections to themselves," while affluent parishioners come irregularly to church and so give irregularly, and the principal heritor is non-resident, with the result that their resources are quite inadequate. Even the old mortcloth dues were beginning to fail. Markinch in 1840 explained that "the return for mortcloths has of late years greatly declined,

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the right of the Kirk Session to exact a fee being occasionally disputed, and not by dissenters alone, though it was first challenged on that side."

The Secessions made the situation bad enough. The Disruption made it impossible. After the Disruption, Kinfauns (Perthshire) reported that they had never had either legal or voluntary assessment for the support of the poor, "but as the church collections and other casualties are now not half sufficient for the purpose, it is but too evident that some such mode of support must very soon be had recourse to."

Some had always regarded the provision by the Church as insufficient. Fletcher of Saltoun in 1698 had declared the poor "very meanly provided for by the church boxes." In 1841, C. Scott in his *Remarks on the Circumstances and Claims of the Indigent Poor* states that "in very few cases can the allowances granted by our Kirk Sessions be with any propriety denominated maintenance or aliment."

The conditions had always been worst in the larger burghs. Aberdeen adopted the legal assessment principle in 1841. The Glasgow Town Council were almost distracted by the situation which they and the General Session had to face. And the Commission which enquired into Scottish poor relief in 1844 received extensive evidence as to the insufficiency of the amount of maintenance provided and the total inability of the voluntary system to meet the case.

Mendicity also was as much of a plague as it had ever been, largely owing to the difficulty of preventing the very people who complained of it from supporting it. Parishes all over the country



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make their protest in the *New Statistical Account* and in 1836 Kirkcaldy had to begin again to supply badges to its own needy parishioners. A society for the suppression of street begging was formed in Aberdeen in 1815, but the evil could not be put down. The most famous effort to maintain the voluntary system was that of Dr. Chalmers in St. John's parish, Glasgow, where he worked deliberately with the aim of vindicating the old method. Karl Holl claims Thomas Chalmers as the first "Christian Socialist" a generation before the term was invented to characterize Charles Kingsley and F. D. Maurice. Glasgow had grown with astounding rapidity since 1810. Church extension had not been attempted by the Church of Scotland, and the surplus population joined the Secession Churches and later the Free Church or remained completely churchless or connected with the Church of Scotland only by the vaguest ties. The General Session of the city could no longer know the circumstances of the poor in their area, and the collections even with the assistance of the funds which the civil authorities provided were totally insufficient. Chalmers, with his devotion to the territorial system, believed he could do the work in his own parish, cheaply and satisfactorily in the old way and in fact he did. His elders and deacons investigated every case, and the personal relationship and spiritual supervision were secured. Chalmers was confirmed in his opinion and wrote largely on the subject, but he did not convince his generation that his plan would work everywhere always and without himself, and difficulties, anomalies

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and dangers in connection with the scheme were discovered, and the result was the Poor Law of 1845, which nationalised and secularised and bureaucratised the care of the poor.

The nineteenth century saw the gradual and almost complete disappearance of Session discipline. Certain improvements in the standard of morals and education and civilization had taken place. Positive exhortation to virtuous and reverent courses was being preferred to exposure of breaches of the moral and spiritual law. By the development of police and local government the Church was relieved of a good deal of the responsibility formerly laid upon it. For various reasons, too, the Church had lost the authority it once exercised over all parishioners, Christian and unchristian alike, and this authority passed to the civil powers. The Church could no longer compel general obedience, and had to be content with ruling its own professed members. Discipline became restricted almost entirely to sexual offences, drunkenness and profanity. Slander cases, and family quarrels and charges of witchcraft, the crime of settling in a parish without a testimonial—even sabbath-breaking—were no longer matters that came before church courts. The sackcloth and rugs and searchers and stool of repentance were things of the past.

Already at Montrose in 1771, "the vacant space where the repentance seat formerly was" was ordered to be filled with pews, and the minister of Lamington (Lanarkshire) stated in the *New Statistical Account* that "the stool of repentance, projecting three feet in advance of Wandell gallery



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at its junction with the south side wall of the church, and having merely a few coarse spars in front so as to afford to the congregation a full view of the culprit, remained here entire (the last, I believe, in the kingdom) till it was removed on repairing the kirk . . . in 1828." The small "cutty stool" which stood before the pulpit has in one or two cases been preserved—as at Auchterhouse, but even it does not figure in nineteenth century records, and sackcloth appearances were unknown.

Opinion was now very largely against any form of public repentance, and the tendency was towards personal private dealing by minister or elder. The Presbytery of Strathbogie in 1804 recommended that public appearance might be dispensed with as "not conducive to edification," and at Grange in this Presbytery the last case seems to have occurred in 1816. Cases of impurity were brought before the Session. At Yester the practice (for example in 1822 and succeeding years) was for those convicted to be rebuked at a Session meeting and then to have "frequent conversing" with the minister or an elder and after a period of perhaps six months to be absolved before the Session. In 1831 a delinquent thus appeared and afterwards the moderator "stated that he had repeated conversation with her and now entertained the hope that she feels in some degree alive to her sin and is sincere in her repentance. The Session agreed that she be admonished by the moderator and absolved from the scandal, which accordingly was done." A Yester parishioner accused of drunkenness in 1823 was refused church privileges till he gave evidence of amendment of life.

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Some Sessions were less exacting than others. At Oldmachar in 1834 the typical entry is "having paid a penalty of 22/- to the poor they were rebuked and dismissed from censure." At Langholm (Dumfriesshire) in 1835 the *New Statistical Account* says, "fines for immoral conduct, irregular marriages, etc., all go to the poor fund." Gilcomston (Aberdeen) *quoad sacra* Session about 1836 simply took a fine from such parties and discharged them. Banff Kirk Session were more enlightened, for in 1835 they resolved "to depart from the exaction of a penalty in consequence of such having a tendency to lead to unscriptural and papistical views." And in 1837 the General Assembly put an end to such practices, forbidding the raising of money for the poor from people under discipline. The customary record at Anstruther Easter about the middle of the century is : "Solemnly rebuked and suitably admonished, absolved from scandal of the sin, and restored to the privileges of the Church."

Offences other than immorality, bad language and intemperance seldom occur, but at Logie near Stirling in 1846 a woman voluntarily confessed to the Session that she had stolen some articles from a shop in Alloa and wished to satisfy discipline. At Kirkcowan (Wigton) some ten years earlier, "about a dozen were deprived of their Christian privileges by the Parish Church Session for promoting devious courses"—that is, for attending services conducted by a Baptist minister. At Yester in 1824 the list of communicants was read and the opinion of elders taken, and several persons were informed that they would not be admitted to Communion on this occasion, while others were



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advised to decline going, but left to judge for themselves. The elders of Anstruther Easter in 1836 before the Communion systematically visited certain persons who had been guilty of irregularity of conduct, neglect of public worship, etc., urging amendment and threatening to debar them from sealing ordinances.

The Secession Church in East Campbell Street Glasgow, in 1812, admonished masons who had assisted at the building of Unitarian and Roman Catholic churches, and next year suspended a man for striking another and declaring to the Session that he was sorry he did not strike him more when he was at it. In 1839 the Secession Church at Savoch (Aberdeenshire) threatened to suspend a man from church privileges if he continued to omit family worship.

Public appearances did indeed persist in certain parts of the country. James Hall, writing in 1807 of his travels in the North of Scotland, says that he was astonished to find that "in some places the repenting stool in their churches is not quite abolished." Certainly in 1837 Dr. Alexander Hill could write that "some Kirk Sessions still require public appearances to be made before the congregation." The Glencairn records show public repentance up to 1831. The minister of Kilmacolm proposed its abolition in 1840, and it was with some hesitation that the Session agreed.

In the *Life* of Dr. Wm. Johnston, Secession minister of Limekilns (Fife) from 1823, we are told that for twenty years of his ministry he had to administer public rebuke, which he did with the utmost distaste. Latterly he suggested that a

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“the male members were ecclesiastically the church” they alone should be present. Presently it was found that none but the elders remained, and after that discipline was administered only before the Session. The Secession church at Kirkwall decided in 1834 that “the public censures of the church ought to be inflicted in the presence of church members only,” and culprits were accordingly dealt with in meetings at the close of public worship. In the United Presbyterian Church at Savoch (Aberdeenshire) cases of impurity are periodically recorded—for example in 1871—as being “rebuked on Sabbath at the close of public worship.”

In the Free Church we find that when at Culsalmond (Aberdeenshire) a woman was obliged to make public appearance about the middle of the century the case was the talk of the district for a long time, the custom having almost died out. But in many Free Churches the practice was well known. Thus at Urquhart cases of public repentance are recorded in 1845 and in many succeeding years up to at least 1893. Certain delinquents—for example in 1862—had to stand on three Sabbaths before the congregation in order to be publicly rebuked.

Sessions found themselves helpless in cases where the guilty persons did not wish to be disciplined even in private, and we find everywhere records which show cases to have been dropped. A fairly common entry—as at Anstruther Easter in 1830—is to the effect: “being duly warned and regularly called, did not compear;” and that is the last we read of it. In the same minutes there



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is a record of 1833 : " having been now summoned for the third and last time has not compeared. The Session resolve therefore to leave the further prosecution of the matter to the parties concerned. The inference is that there was a sheriff-court case for aliment. In the same parish in 1864 a man intimated to the Session "that he positively declines to appear," and the elders in consequence "deem it unnecessary to issue any further summons." As early as 1797 the Session of Oldmachar had appointed a treasurer to collect fines and when necessary prosecute for them in cases where parties "do not chuse to submit to the common forms of discipline." The elders thought the fines would help the poor, and they allowed the collector a percentage on what he could extort.

The traditional testimonial recording satisfaction completed was sometimes given—as at Anstruther Easter in 1831. At Yester in 1825 a man applied for a certificate of character as he was about to leave the parish, and the Session minute reads : "As his conduct had by no means been very correct of late, the clerk was ordered to give him as simple a certificate as possible, and after being admonished, he was exhorted not to apply for sealing ordinances in the parish to which he was going, for some months to come."

In 1884 the Gilcomston Session resolved that all cases of ante-nuptial fornication should henceforth be dealt with by the minister in private. The Session at Oxnam came to the same decision in 1897. In this parish an aggravated case of immorality was before the Session in 1899, was referred to the Presbytery, and remitted back to

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the Session with powers. The greater excommunication seems to be almost unknown to nineteenth century Church experience. Private rebuke by minister or elder tended to be the only method of dealing with cases, the facts being vaguely reported to the Session, a record made, and absolution recorded or in the event of contumacy the lesser excommunication, involving merely exclusion from the Lord's table, inflicted. The Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1902 put an end to the unfortunate citation method of the 1707 *Form of Process*, and the extremely legalistic nature of the proceedings. Other relaxations were likewise admitted, more discretion being allowed to ministers, discipline cases being ordered to be recorded in a special book kept for the purpose and not in the Session minute book, and there is the further instruction that names shall be rendered illegible after five years. Many congregations in fact make no record whatever of discipline cases. The whole situation has changed, though the inconsiderable Free Presbyterian Church which came into existence in 1893 as a conservative protest in the matter of Doctrine has shown itself similarly reluctant to abandon the old standards in the sphere of Discipline.

For a considerable part of the century education remained a direct concern of the ruling elder. Scottish educational conditions had definitely improved after the Act of Parliament of 1696, and again under the guidance of the S.P.C.K. after 1709. A further step was taken when in 1803 better conditions for teachers were decreed by law. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the *New*



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*Statistical Account* relatively cheerful about the whole subject. Dunbog (Fife) stated that "there is no person in the parish unable to read and write, but very many who read and write very ill." Other parishes are not quite so discriminating. Westerkirk (Dumfries) simply claimed that "there is not an individual betwixt six and fifteen years of age who cannot read and write ;" Carstairs (Lanarkshire) that "there are none in the parish above ten years of age who cannot read ;" Wiston and Robertson (Lanarkshire) that "in the poorest hamlets in the most distant parts in the parish you will not find a child of six years of age who has not been at school." The exceptions are to be found in the counties of Ross, Inverness and Argyll. At Gairloch for example "not more than one in ten of the whole population is able to read or write in English." Religious instruction is stressed. St. Mungo (Dumfries) reports : "The school is opened and closed with prayer. The whole Bible is in daily use ; the shorter catechism of this Church is regularly taught."

In addition to the Parochial schools and those of the S.P.C.K. (which were to all intents and purposes Church of Scotland schools) there were now Sessional schools in many places and especially in towns, but there were besides these some schools of the Secession Churches, and after the Disruption the Free Church sought to establish as far as possible a school in every parish, while some districts had also Episcopal or Roman Catholic schools, and there were very numerous private schools, while Burgh schools were in a position of their own. Free Church teachers were less highly paid than

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some others and had not such perquisites as Proclamation fees or Registrar's salary. The provision through mortifications was much better in certain places than in others. There was very clearly need for unity of control, co-ordination of method, uniformity of standard, and completeness of distribution, and this could only be attained by nationalisation. The Kirk Sessions of the various Presbyterian Churches exercised much influence, but it was of a provincial type. Financial supply was very limited, ideas as to accommodation remained extremely primitive, and though the advantages of education were now most generally acknowledged, there was nothing very enlightened about the curriculum. Schoolmasters being mostly appointed by minister and heritors or by Kirk Sessions, and being under the supervision of Presbyteries and all required to sign the Confession of Faith and being frequently men of clerical ambition, religious instruction was prominent, the children's concern with Church and Bible was under constant stimulation, and the possibility of the ministry as a profession was kept well before the brighter lads.

An important advance due to Church enterprise was the establishment of Training Colleges for teachers. These remained under Church control till 1906, and Dr. Alexander Morgan (*Rise and Progress of Scottish Education*) says that "it is universally acknowledged that they discharged their duties well and performed a national service for which the country can never be too grateful." The Church has still some standing with regard to the Training Centres, for it provides and pays



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Directors of Religious Education, whose classes though voluntary are attended by practically all who are in preparation for the work of teaching, and at one centre the Church offers a diploma in the subject of religious instruction.

Secularisation showed itself first in connection with Burgh Schools, which had always been loosely associated with the Church. Town Councils managed these well; and the Sessions had in many cases no standing at all. The Act of 1861 finally put an end to Presbyterian supervision of such schools and relieved teachers from the necessity of signing the Confession of Faith. There followed the Act of 1872, which handed over education to the civil authorities. Ministers and elders—especially in the country—continued to exercise a good deal of influence on School Boards, but this was in practice much diminished by the Act of 1918 and still more by the Act of 1929.

Very great advances have followed from the nationalisation of education. It seems plain that (at least financially) only the nation was competent to deal with the situation. As in many other departments, however, the initiative was with the Church. It insisted upon the need, and finally society was convinced, and accepted responsibility. And in the process the elder played a worthy part.

The activities of the Session in connection with Communion remained much as before. Formerly elders were asked before each Communion occasion to make a list of those in their districts to whom tokens should be given. At Portmoak (Kinross) in 1706 we hear of the roll being read, such as were allowed tokens marked, and each elder given

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a list of those in his quarter who were to communicate. At Dalmellington in 1728 we find the Session "making up the roll of communicants." From 1835 the keeping of a properly attested Roll has been a duty of the Session. The Roll as we know it is more a list of persons with voting rights than anything else, and there is a good deal of dissatisfaction with the system, especially amongst those who wish to encourage frequent Communion and who prefer the unregistered membership of Church of England practice. Sessions in large parishes have also difficulty in keeping rolls so well purged as they used to be. There is a desire in some quarters for large numbers as an indication of a successful ministry, and there is a charitable inclination to overlook ineffectiveness of membership, and there is also ignorance on the part of the eldership as to the full facts with regard to those in their own districts. The Session of course continued to regulate admission to Communion, and tokens were regularly distributed before the Communion Sunday. Tokens were replaced by cards in most parishes before the close of the century—for example at Ballingry (Fife) in 1882. At Dreghorn (Ayrshire) we read in 1751 of "young communicants" examined before the Session, and this continued to be the ordinary practice.

The arrangements for the Communion services were simplified by the abandonment of the questionable custom of crowding to neighbouring Communions, and having tent services from morning to night. At Inchinnan (Renfrewshire) we read in the *New Statistical Account* that "preaching from



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a tent on sacramental occasions has been given up for about twenty years." Keir parish (Dumfries), however, reported at that same time that Communion was still being conducted in the open and people were attending in large numbers from other parishes; and at Penpont in the same county the Communion had never been celebrated inside the church till 1834. In some Highland districts Communion outside was still common in the later nineteenth century—for example at Creich (Sutherland).

Many churches had fixed pews down the centre of the building which were used as Communion tables when required. Some of these still exist, as at Dyke (Elgin). At Crawford (Lanarkshire) it is reported in the *New Statistical Account* that "there are at present no free sittings except the Communion tables," and at Biggar in the same county: "The Communion table affords 44 sittings which are free." The report from Dunino (Fife) at that same time was that there were "eight pews in front of the pulpit and adjoining which are let by the Kirk Session, and these form the sacred tables at the Communion season." The use of the ordinary pews for Communion was known in Glasgow by the beginning of the century. In 1821 there was trouble in connection with the arrangement of the seats in the new St. James's Church, where the Town Council had taken for granted that the new method would be adopted. Simultaneous Communion took place at Ballingry for the first time in 1873. A small Communion table for the elements had long been common. At Perth in 1638 there was a "little table" as

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well as the long boards. At Mertoun (Roxburgh) in 1705 we read of "a four square table to set the Communion elements upon." The abolition of the old type of Communion table made this special table more important and it became a piece of the permanent furniture, although some churches continued merely to supply a table of this sort at Communion seasons, and in many others the table was for most part of the year a mere convenience for hats and books. This stage is probably over now, and the tendency is rather in the other direction, a permanent table in a central position indicating not merely an architectural fashion but a theological emphasis, and approximating to the altar rather than to the supper table.

Sessions decided when Communion should be observed and recorded the observance. In the country one celebration in the year was customary. At Oxnam in 1860 and at Cullen in 1866 the practice of having two Communion seasons in the year was introduced. The United Presbyterian Church in line with English nonconformists encouraged more frequent Communion, and a large number of congregations in Scotland have now four celebrations annually.

The elders are responsible for seeing that utensils and elements are available, however supplied, and towards the close of the century both of these caused some anxiety, the individual cup and unfermented wine becoming subjects of serious difference of opinion. In both these connections losses and gains are difficult to calculate. Hygiene and solemnity are not easy to balance in the scales. Neither port nor unfermented wine is an article of



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the ordinary supper table, which was what our Lord seems originally to have chosen as a sacramental medium. The Church of Scotland has been more conservative than the sister denominations in these matters, and uniformity of practice cannot be said to be within sight.

In the nineteenth century the Session had perhaps less than ever to do with Baptism, for this was now generally celebrated in private. The Banff record of 1841 does not stand alone when it declares that "public baptism has in this parish been discontinued for upwards of fifty years." Only towards the close of the century did it become at all common again.

Family worship, in the encouragement of which the seventeenth century Session was assiduous, was apparently not so generally observed in the early nineteenth century. Dr. Paul (*Past and Present of Aberdeenshire*) says it was much neglected even by the clergy in his young days. Probably it was better observed in the Secession Church. About 1830 Kirkwall Secession elders reported their satisfaction with the way in which the practice was kept up. The Church of Scotland Assembly in 1836 took the matter in hand and no doubt succeeded in reviving the observance to some extent. At Crawford (Lanark) in 1838 sixty families of the small population could be said to have family worship every day and another sixty had family worship each Sunday. Later in the century it was again fairly common, but things have changed once more, and family worship seems only to survive in the more puritanical circles.

There has been no diminution of the importance of the work done by elders on the higher courts

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of the Church. Acts of Assembly in 1816 and 1839 had been necessary to put a stop to certain irregularities in this connection. But in all the denominations an active and important part in the Assembly continued to be played by laymen. In the *Life* of Dr. Robert Lee it is suggested that the elders as a whole were strongly conservative and even reactionary. One only requires to glance through volumes of the published debates of any of the denominations to realise that elders were at least prominent in the discussions. There is no doubt of the reality of the place they took in the government of their churches at headquarters.

The Session was still in control of the praise at the Sunday services. In connection with St. Enoch's Church, Glasgow, we find an application before the Town Council in 1814 for the use of certain seats "for the accommodation of a vocal band engaged to assist in the music." Banff Session in 1842 gave up their seat below the pulpit to "female singers." In 1865 the precentor's desk in Anstruther Easter Church was removed and a space railed in for a choir, one elder dissenting. In the Aberdeen Associate Church (now Melville) there was an attempt at improvement of the praise in 1830. It was suggested that two lines be given out at a time instead of one, and that the number of tunes in use be extended, petitioners in the congregation asking that some be added as "all very decent and becoming the worship of God," these including tunes now so well known as Irish, Colchester, Martyrdom and Old Hundred. The Session finally agreed that occasionally one of the



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proposed new tunes might be tried, but they assumed a very non-committal attitude.

The Relief Church showed the way to advance in the use of Hymns, having a selection issued at the close of the eighteenth century, and the U. P. Church was afterwards enterprising in this direction. There is frequent reference to the matter in Session records. Thus the U. P. Session at Savoch in 1865 complied with a strong desire expressed at a congregational meeting and introduced the use of hymns.

In 1861 the Church of Scotland congregation at Banff was quick to accept the first hymnary available and we find one or other of the earlier editions mentioned in records in different parts of the country. Anstruther Easter bought a Hymnal for the pulpit in 1871. In this same year Oldmachar set about having a few paid singers, the praise being from the Northern Psalter and the new Hymnal. The Tron Church, Edinburgh, was a few years before this in having paid singers and introduced prose psalms and anthems.

At Savoch U. P. Church in 1878 the Session minutes that "it shall be recognised as the custom in this congregation to stand at praise and kneel or sit at prayer during public worship." In the parish of Oxnam (Roxburgh) standing at praise and sitting at prayer was introduced in 1876, only one member and his wife objecting to such "innovations," his appeal being discussed by the Presbytery and withdrawn before consideration by the Synod. Falkirk Session took the same step in 1877.

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Instrumental music was the next improvement. The abortive attempt to employ an organ in St. Andrew's Church, Glasgow, took place in 1807, and it was not till 1864 that the Assembly's attention was called to the use of a harmonium in Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh. Other churches soon followed, Ballingry 1876, Banff 1877, Falkirk 1884, Anstruther Easter 1884, Logie near Stirling 1887, Oxnam not till 1894. Newhills Parish Church (Aberdeen) has never to this day had instrumental music. One can still remember one or two very convinced objectors who had to move from church to church in the vain flight from a harmonium. Organs were not long in replacing harmoniums in the larger churches and the musical part of the service became more and more important and effective. In the Free Church the opposition continued to be fairly strong. Dr. Candlish had been particularly hostile. The Assembly of 1883 resolved that "there is nothing in the word of God or in the constitution and laws of this Church to preclude the use of instrumental music as an aid to vocal praise," but for some succeeding years the Assembly had to discuss motions which attempted to reverse the decision. One elder declared that the dead according to scripture could not praise God and asked if an organ was alive? He compared praising God with a windmill to the Buddhist praying to God with a windmill. The present Free Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Free Presbyterian Church and Original Secession Church still reject instrumental music, still sit while singing, and still sing no hymns.

The gradual disappearance of the old Fast Days



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must also be recorded. At Logie (Stirling) in 1887 we read : "it was unanimously resolved that the Thursday previous to the approaching summer Communion be held as a fast this year, but that in future it be discontinued." The Fast Day at Banff was abolished in 1889 "in view of the abuses connected with Fast Days in recent years in this parish." Anstruther Easter discontinued its Fast Days in 1888. Some parishes kept at least the use of the name until quite recently—for example Daviot (Aberdeenshire) and Oxnam (Roxburghshire).

Important new activities under Session patronage made their appearance in the nineteenth century. None is more in evidence in the *New Statistical Account* than the Sunday School—or as it was long called, Sabbath School. By that date there were in most parishes a number of such schools, rather primitive but no doubt stimulating to piety and Bible knowledge, and elders seem to have been in charge of most. Prayer meetings also afforded members of Session special opportunities of service.

The general work of a parish as supervised by the Session in this period may be well judged from the account given by the Kirk Session of Banff in 1838, which makes mention of a Sabbath School in the Church two hours weekly, Bible classes both on Sunday and week-days taught by the minister and an elder, a weekly prayer meeting presided over by one of the elders, a monthly meeting in the church "for prayer and religious intelligence," a parochial and a Sabbath school library, young communicants' classes, arrangements for seeing the

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minister on business, annual catechising throughout the parish, an association for promoting the Assembly's Five Schemes, etc.

During the course of the century, churches improved in appearance and a new standard of maintenance becomes obvious. An item for regular cleaning of the church begins to appear in the session accounts. In Glasgow the Tron Church was heated in 1806, St. Andrew's followed in 1810, and others were not far behind. Strathblane before 1845 could boast a steam boiler and pipe for heating. Balmerino introduced a stove in 1861. Anstruther Easter set about having the church heated in 1867. With improvement in lighting systems evening services became practicable and common. The Church Halls became a matter for serious consideration. By 1875 the Baird Trust had fully recognised the importance of such accommodation, and a church such as Flowerhill *quoad* *acra*, Airdrie, built partly with their help and opened in that year, had from the beginning what was then regarded as a fine hall. Gilcomston was thinking of halls in 1884, Oldmachar in 1886, Balmerino in 1887, Kirkwall U.P. Church in 1887. Halls not only facilitated organisations, but encouraged the social life of the congregation with its Sales of Work, and its pathetic "soirees" and other mild entertainments.

Kirk Sessions had often to turn their attention to public questions and matters of general church policy. In the U.P. and Free Churches this was more the case than in the Church of Scotland, sessions in the former bodies being more frequently consulted by Assembly on important matters, but



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an example from the Church of Scotland would be the Annuity Tax Bill in 1869. *Quoad sacra* Kirk Sessions, which sprang up in great numbers during the second half of the century, were in the same position as others with regard to most interests.

The nineteenth century thus witnessed considerable change in the activities of the eldership, some serious straitening, but at the same time developments in spiritual directions, leaving the eldership still at the close of the period an honoured and cherished feature of the life of every Presbyterian denomination. Dr. Wallace Williamson's commendation may close the chapter for us. "The constitution of our Church," he says, "presents special facilities for utilising the pious laity. The institution of the eldership, for instance, is a valuable link between the minister and the congregation. The possibilities presented by it have, it must be acknowledged, been very imperfectly realised. Still, it has succeeded to a remarkable degree in engaging the laity in definite responsibilities for service to the Church. Making every allowance for failure and the mere perfunctoriness in discharge of solemn duties which in many cases no doubt prevails, it must be admitted that a vast amount of helpful service has been rendered and is being rendered now by the eldership of the Church. I can conceive no institution better fitted for this purpose, and the development of lay work will certainly be immensely furthered, not by neglecting this peculiarity of our Presbyterian system but by insisting on the dignity and honour, while also clearly distinguishing between the duties of

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that office and that of the Holy Ministry. We certainly have in the eldership a powerful adjunct, a most valuable source of lay help ready to our hands."



## VIII

### THE ELDER IN LITERATURE AND LIFE

THE elder has been a person of moment in Scottish life. It is impossible to give an account of any district without frequent allusion to the Session, its members and their activities, and in local reminiscences and memoirs and sketches they almost inevitably appear in some prominence. The writers of Scottish fiction and poetry have also very naturally found themselves giving an interesting place to an institution so outstanding and characteristic as the Eldership. Individual elders, too, have played important parts in the country's history. A glance at what is thus revealed will help towards a just estimate of the value and possibilities of the office we are studying.

Robert Burns, on whom the world at large has to some extent based its judgment of things Scottish, has not neglected to mention the Elder and the Kirk Session. Our "immortal bard" is to be found in a group of inimitable lyrics, charged with the truest poetic feeling and characterised by felicitous expression. That is the Burns of whom Scotland may well be proud. But there is much in Burns—as indeed in Shakespeare—that no one reads with pleasure or satisfaction, though it is useful realism from the historical point of view.

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There is a certain amount that is merely the self-portrayal of a coarse farm labourer. Burns was upon one side of his nature a person of weak will and low animal tastes, and it was scarcely surprising that he found himself the victim of the disciplinary system of the Church. He had no sympathy with the ideals that inspired that system, and its obvious failure to have any solemnizing or remedial influence in his case is indeed a severe condemnation of it from the practical standpoint. Burns had his remorseful moments, but they seem to have occurred rather in the public-house than in the Church. His references to this kind of thing are therefore unashamed, as in the *Jolly Beggars*, the *Whistle*, the *Answer to a Poetical Epistle*, *O gude ale comes*, and *Address to Toothache*. His personal experience of ministers was largely unfortunate, and his prejudices increased the bitterness of his criticisms, while he vented his spiteful but by no means causeless wrath against elders also. Besides, like all careless livers, he had a certain contempt for the orderly and respectable, and seized what opportunity offered of magnifying the weaknesses and advertising the shortcomings of those who represented to him the enemies of liberty. It was not by those long-faced, gloomy, self-admiring, uncharitable inquisitors that such as he could be led to feel the glory of the Christ-like life. His destructive criticism has no doubt served a purpose. He was specially effective in *Holy Willy's Prayer*, a satire upon the slimy hypocrite undoubtedly discoverable in some Kirk Sessions—the Judas of the community, the whited sepulchre with which all religions, denominations and generations are



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familiar, the incarnation of the defects of a decaying system of moral government. Fortunately Burns had met the other sort also. He knew there were people of the type of "the priest-like father" of the *Cottar's Saturday Night*, and as these made their appearance in the ranks of ordinary parishioners so also they might even more readily be found amongst those selected for the public and responsible position of elder. Even the reference in *Robin shure in hairst* to the position of an "eller's dochter" is a hint of the awe with which the members of the Session were popularly regarded. In the *Holy Fair* there is also an allusion to the elder at the plate :

"When by the plate we set our nose  
Weel heaped up wi' ha'pence,  
A greedy glow'r black bonnet throws,  
An' we maun draw our tippence."

Sir Walter Scott, of genius as undoubted and of character vastly superior, was able to take a kindlier view. He was more competent to criticise, for he had more capacity to appreciate. His scorn for the self-righteous was as great, but he was free from malice, and was upon the whole as fair to his weak or evil characters as a romantic writer could possibly be—much juster, I believe, than some of his critics have realised. His own father was no doubt the prototype of Saunders Fairford depicted in *Redgauntlet*, and an "elder of the kirk." Sir Walter himself was a member of the Kirk Session of Duddingston Parish Church, having signed the Westminster Confession and acknowledged Presbyterian Church Government. He was chosen a

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ruling elder to attend the Presbytery of Edinburgh and the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, sat as an elder representing the Burgh of Selkirk in the General Assembly and attended ordinary meetings of Session, as the records of sederunt show. He knew elders of various types and describes them. He was not blind to the possibility of a double life, and in the *Bride of Lammermuir* portrays one who was "a zealous elder of the Church when on shore, and when on board his brig as bold a smuggler as ever ran out a sliding bowsprit to the winds that blow betwixt Campvere and the East Coast of Scotland." But as a rule eldership is a badge of worth and respectability. Oldbuck in the *Antiquary* "was upon principle a stanch Presbyterian, a ruling elder of the kirk and a friend to Revolution principles and the Protestant succession." Mr. Crossmyloof, the advocate in *Heart of Midlothian*, is "a round-spun Presbyterian and a ruling elder to boot." We are reminded of the Session's attitude to witchcraft by the quotation in *Waverley*, *Heart of Midlothian* and *Guy Mannering* of the text, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and in the last novel there is also a passing remark about the care of the poor which consists in "just dinging down a saxpence in the brod on the Sabbath." The strictness with which Sunday was observed under the eye of the Session receives some notice, as for example in *Guy Mannering*, where Mr. Skreigh will not "sing daft auld sangs sae near the Sabbath day."

But most of the references in Scott are to the Church discipline. In the *Tales of a Grandfather* there is a paragraph on the subject: "Enquiry into the conduct of individuals was carried on by the



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Church Courts with indecent eagerness, and faults or follies much fitter for private censures and admonition were brought forward in the face of the public congregation. The hearers were charged every Sabbath-day that each individual should communicate to the Kirk Session . . . whatever matter of scandal or offence against religion and morality should come to their ears, and thus an inquisitorial power was exercised by one half of the parish over the other. This was well meant but had bad consequences. Every idle story being made the subject of anxious investigation, the private happiness of families was disturbed, and discord and suspicion were sown where mutual confidence is most necessary." Scott's own attitude would have been that of Butler in the *Heart of Midlothian* who was inclined to cause his elders anxiety by "loosening of the reins of discipline." "I cannot," he said, "be persecuting old women for witches or ferreting out matter of scandal among the young ones which might otherwise have remained concealed." His father-in-law, Douce David Deans was of a different mind. He defended the "just powers of eldership," and speaks of "the kirk o' whilk though unworthy I have yet been thought a polished shaft, and meet to be a pillar, holding from my youth upward, the place of ruling elder." His attitude is revealed by his words on the discovery of Effie's fall and his opinion even at the last when from being a Cameronian elder he had become an elder of the Church of Scotland, and when he declared : "As to his not allowing enquiry anent the scandal of Margery Kittlesides and Rory MacRand under pretence that they have southered

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sin wi' marriage, it's clear agane the Christian discipline o' the Kirk." There are a number of passages which proclaim that the rich did not suffer so severely as the poor from Session discipline. Nanty Ewart in *Redgauntlet* says : " You know the old song, ' Kirk would not let us be.' A gentleman, in my case, would have settled the matter with the Kirk Treasurer for a small sum of money, but the poor stibbler, the penniless dominie, having married his cousin of Kittlebasket, must next have proclaimed her frailty to the whole parish, by mounting the throne of Presbyterian penance." In *Guy Mannering* the laird says : " Ye needna shake your head and groan, Dominie. I am sure the Kirk dues were a' well paid, and what can man do mair." That all the frail paid penalties is behind the remark that the censorious " can find out naething but a wee bit skulduddery for the benefit of the Kirk Treasurer." Singleside in *Guy Mannering* " satisfied the kirk," and in the *Black Dwarf* there is just a passing reference to sessional certificates. Jeanie Deans suggests that the " cutty stool " or " stool of repentance " was one reason for the prevalence of child murder in Scotland.

Perhaps Scott was harsh towards extremists among the Covenanters as in *Old Mortality* ; but these were men too unbalanced to have been readily accepted as elders anywhere. He was of course no friend to evangelical narrowness or bigotry, and he also knew how merely political was the part which leading moderate elders in the higher courts of the Church were accustomed to play. But men of true religion—David Deans with all his straitness, Major Miles Bellenden, whose library consisted



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of the *Bible* and the *Whole Duty of Man*, Henry Morton, with his charity wider than the sects, and other patterns of the sincere Christian, Scott was well able to appreciate, and it has always been men just like these that have constituted the strength of the eldership. Sir Walter was drawn rather to the Episcopal Church as he knew it. McCrie's voluble attack upon *Old Mortality* does reveal some misunderstanding on Scott's part of what Episcopacy had been like in Scotland in earlier times, but certainly Scott found the Protestant type of Christian repulsive, though he could admire a good Evangelical such as Erskine quite as wholeheartedly as he could a characteristic Moderate like Robertson. We can say that he is fair to the eldership and has displayed it and its duties and temptations with sufficient understanding.

Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, which has often been compared with the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and is indeed full of real insight, treating the foibles and failings of all with a hand at once tender and firm, displaying with equal skill the very hearts of the villagers and the Manse-folk and the gentry, has a good deal of actual information to convey regarding the work of a Kirk Session in the period after the French Revolution. One passage reminds us how the elders would be seated by themselves below the pulpit during the service. We gather that the Session funds though small were well able to relieve the needs of the local poor and were distributed with thorough knowledge of the circumstances. The Session provides a coffin for a pauper. Discipline cases are mentioned more than once. An example such as we come across elsewhere occurs

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of one who on the stool of repentance attempted a crude practical joke by concealing himself under two coats and two wigs. An elder comes to see the minister "about a fact that was found out in the clachan." We note the concern of the Session with proclamations of marriage. An interesting passage reveals the new feelings with regard to public appearances in connection with discipline: "In conformity with the altered fashions of the age, in this year (1804) the Session came to an understanding with me that we should not inflict the common Church censures for such as made themselves liable thereto; but we did not formally promulge our resolution as to this, wishing as long as possible to keep the deterring rod over the heads of the young and thoughtless. Our motive was, on the one hand, the disregard of the manufacturers in Cayenneville, who were, without the breach of truth, an irreligious people, and on the other, a desire to preserve the ancient and wholesome admonitory and censorian jurisdiction of the ministers and elders. We therefore laid it down as a rule to ourselves that in the case of transgressions on the part of the inhabitants of the new district of Cayenneville we should subject them rigorously to a fine; but, for the farming lads, we would put it in their option to pay the fine, or stand in the Kirk." The elders kept an eye on the minister and were by no means always led by his opinion, and latterly when he was clearly failing they persuaded him to accept a helper. Individual elders are described; one who "was a douce and discreet man, fair and welldoing in the world and had a better hand-ful of strong commonsense than many



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even of the heritors ; ” another who was a “ shrewd and clear-seeing man in points of theology.” In the *Ayrshire Legatees*, which is characterised by the same type of humour, we have also references to discipline cases tenderly dealt with. We are introduced to elders of different types, one “ rigidly righteous ” and “ sanctimonious ” who in spite of his “ pious animadversions ” turns out no better than he should have been ; and another, much less serious but much more humane. We hear of the “ broad at the door ” and the “ venerable elder lending sanctity to his office by reason of his age.”

In the literature of a later period an elder and his troubles with the minister and some of his fellows is the hero of Norman Macleod's *The Starling*—a simple story of a country parish which went through many editions. Various types in the Kirk Session appear in its pages, and we note how the elder visits the sick and bedridden in his district. Norman Macleod, in his *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish*, refers to his father's days, and has much to say of the value of the Kirk Session when there were no law courts in the neighbourhood and disputes of many kinds were settled by the Session. He speaks of the poor as “ carefully visited ” by elders as well as minister, and their circumstances accurately ascertained and special help provided when required.

There is mention of elders in Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonny Brier Bush* and *Kate Carnegie*, and they naturally play a part in J. M. Barrie's *Little Minister* and *Auld Licht Idylls*, and S. R. Crockett's *Stickit Minister*. A more recent novel, John Buchan's *Witch Wood*, introduces extensive

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ference to the eldership of the mid-seventeenth century. The author is peculiarly intimate with those days of Montrose, and has apparently had access to ecclesiastical records such as those of the parish of Broughton, so that much interesting information regarding Church life is forthcoming. There are a few anachronisms, details which are clearly set back from a later period ; but the general account is accurate. On the other hand the antinomian Kirk Session is far from convincing, and though Presbyterianism was at its sternest in that generation, the whole picture given here is definitely too black. Other recent stories have some reference to the more modern eldership, as, for example, *Ann and her Mother*, by 'O. Douglas' and Nan Shepherd's *Weatherhouse*. Even George Macdonald has passing allusions to elders in *Alexander Forbes* and *David Elginbrod*.

We may take a few examples to show the extent to which elders play a part in minor and local Scottish literature. There are references to the Kirk Session and to its discipline in *Jeannie Jaffray*, sketches of Aberdeen town and country life in the seventeenth century by J. T. *The Chronicles of Glenbuckie*, by Henry Johnston, deal with the Disruption period and we have much of elders, some convivial, others easily scandalised, self-important, making show with pious phrases, mostly kindhearted beneath it all. William MacGillivray gives a short sketch of *The Elder and his Wife*, which offers recollections of a Kincardineshire village in the early nineteenth century. There are elders of various sorts in John Strathesk's *Bits from Blinkbonny*. John Cunningham's *Broomie-*



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*burn* gives a picture of nineteenth-century Border life, and has a chapter entitled "An Elder o' the Kirk," from which illuminating passages may be quoted.

"Upright, honourable, fair dealing, but a close hand at a bargain, the elder was a man greatly respected in the district. He was considered an authority on doctrine and church discipline, and as such was a terror to young ministers inclined to alter even in the slightest degree the form of public worship. Innovations he hated with an intensity worthy of a better cause, and woe betide the man who would have dared in his presence to suggest the propriety of introducing instrumental music into the kirk service. . . . Severe in his remarks where a question of morality was involved, the elder yet had beneath his rugged exterior a warm heart, and his hard words of condemnation were often followed by kindly deeds."

And equally interesting : "An elder . . . is a soort o' leading man i' the kirk, chosen by the congregation. He maun be a man o' some sense, weel acquainted wi' the carritches, honest, upright, sober an' respeckit. He needna' be rich. . . . He maun gie roun' an' take up the collection, or take his turn tae stan' at the plate, sit in the Kirk Session, an' if he's no' guid at speakin' he can aye objec'. Some folk think he ought to be strang in prayer, in case he micht be caa'd on at a happenin' time ; but I wad pit soun' doctrine afore that."

Alexander's *Johnny Gibb o' Gushetneuk*, a classic of Aberdeenshire in the Disruption days, incidentally sheds light upon the eldership, and we learn that elders had not for a while been much in evidence in

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Presbytery and Synod until their votes became precious in the exciting controversies of that period, that men of "substance" were preferred to humbler Christians for the eldership, that Sessions were sometimes small, with perhaps only two elders, and these of advanced years, that an elder was not always free from the imputation of tipsiness on a market day, that one who had family worship or was interested in a Sunday school might be "reckoned very wild in his religious opinions," and that a man might be made an elder simply to keep him "docile and submissively attached to the kirk." 'Hugh Haliburton' has a short description of the elder in his little book about Burns, *In Scottish Fields*. T. F. Henderson has a sharp attack upon Session discipline in *Old World Scotland*. In Moir's *Mansie Wauch*, the hero's father is "an elder in the Relief Kirk, respected by all for his canny and douce behaviour . . . a weaver to his trade." William Watson in *Glimpses o' Auld Lang Syne* shows some unfavourable pictures of elders in the Church of Scotland and Free Church from the middle of the nineteenth century.

Turning again to a different class of literature we may take Boston's *Memoirs*, which have many allusions to his elders at Simprin and Ettrick in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. We have mention of various duties they performed, and a number of individual elders are portrayed in a single phrase or in a fuller description, so that the book is a valuable source of information regarding country sessions at that time. One elder is thus described :  
'A good man, a comfortable fellow labourer,



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and a supporter or rather *the* supporter of me in my troubles in this place. He was always a friend to ministers. . . . Though he was a poor man yet he had always a brow for a good cause, and was a faithful, useful elder, and as he was very ready to reprove sin, so he had a singular dexterity in the matter of admonition and reproof, to speak a word upon the wheels, so as to convince with a certain sweetness, that it was hard to take his reproof ill."

Wodrow's *Analecta* amidst much curious information regarding Church affairs at the beginning of the eighteenth century and earlier has many references to elders. We hear of their visiting with the minister, of their kindly personal dealing with souls in distress, of their credulous piety, of their importance in the days when patronage was becoming more and more disliked. One of the most interesting passages refers to their work in the higher courts of the Church in Wodrow's own time. "I remark a vast influence of ruling elders in the Assembly and Commission. What struggle we had with them in the Union Commission all then present know; and I notice they speak more by a great deal than all the rest of the members. And then in businesses relative to the publick as fasts, etc., and in transportations and calls they are either related to or acquainted with the parties and scandalously they involve themselves in such debates as parties rather than judges. I own several of them are great blessings and very useful but I fear they prove a dead weight upon this Church." Wodrow has also an informing letter on the office and qualifications of ruling elders in

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his *Correspondence*, and to this reference is made elsewhere in the present volume.

A very lively account of a late eighteenth century elder is afforded us by Thomas Somerville in his *Life and Times*, where he describes Mr. Crosbie the advocate—Sir Walter's Mr. Pleydell. "Frequently returned a member of the General Assembly as a ruling elder, was by far the most respectable and powerful lay champion for the popular interest. He was a man of the strictest honour, and wise and learned above most of his profession. His zeal, his information, and manly eloquence, strenuously exerted in support of the right of the people to elect their own minister, revived the zeal of his party.

Mr. Crosbie possessed a vigorous constitution, but, being too much addicted to social festivity, he sunk into intemperate habits which brought him to his grave at an untimely age. . . . The goodness of his heart and his transcendent abilities made his death universally lamented."

Few books give us a more vivid picture of religious conditions in the north of Scotland in the early nineteenth century than Sage's *Memorabilia Domestica*. The author affirms that Highland elders were invariably chosen when advanced in age, and only those were thought of who were eminently Christian. He describes the Session of Resolis (Ross-shire) in 1822 as consisting of weighty men whose judgment everyone respected. Elders of this and other parishes whom he portrays differed widely in gifts and character, but many of them must have been a real strength to the Church. One is "an intelligent and deeply exercised Christian," an able speaker and held in high regard.



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Another "was remarkable for the simplicity of his faith . . . he was uniformly and habitually a trustful Christloving Christian." Another was "a man of deep and fervent piety," and mighty in the Scriptures. Faults are not passed over in Sage's account, and we hear of elders who are "not a little opinionative," "very hot tempered," "somewhat fretful," while of one it is reported : "His understanding was very clouded, and in prayer or in speaking to the question he was long and tedious," and of the Session of Lochcarron it is said that the elders were weak and injudicious and carried all the local idle gossip to the minister. We hear of elders who brought people to church by force, and of at least one case of an elder who exercised unpardonable cruelty in discipline.

William Chambers writes a description of his grandfather which deserves to be quoted : "To the poor and wretched he was an ever-ready friend, adviser and consoler. I have heard it related that on Sunday evenings he would return exhausted with his religious peregrinations and exercises—having in the course of a few hours visited perhaps as many as a dozen sick or dying persons, and offered up an extempore and suitable prayer at each."

Hugh Miller has naturally one or two references to elders in his *Schools and Schoolmasters*. *Old Aberdeenshire Ministers and their People*, by John Davidson, gives a lively description of members of Session in the middle of the nineteenth century and Russell in his *Reminiscences of Yarrow* has likewise some vivid pictures of both Parish church and Seceder representatives of the office.

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J. G. Lockhart in *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* gives an interesting account of ministers and elders in General Assembly. He scarcely catches the spirit of those gatherings in saying that the Lord High Commissioner's work is "to preside over the disputes of the Scottish ministers and elders," and he is rather sarcastic about the young advocates selected by burghs and distant Presbyteries to represent them as ruling elders. Elsewhere there is a good account of a Communion service in the country, the elders distributing the bread and the wine, after standing at the gates in charge of "a tall three-legged stool covered with a very white napkin, on the top of which was laid the flat pewter dish intended for the reception of the alms." His description of the elders themselves must be quoted: "I regarded them as the élite of this pious peasantry, men selected to discharge these functions on account of the exemplary propriety and purity of their long lives spent among the same people, over whom they were now raised to some priest-like measure of authority. Some among them were very old men, with fine hoary ringlets floating halfway down their backs—arrayed in suits of black, the venerably antique outlines of which showed manifestly how long they had been needed, and how carefully they had been preserved for these rare occasions of solemnity—the only occasions, I imagine, on which they are worn. The heads of these were very comfortably covered with the old flat blue-bonnet, which throws a deep and dark shadow over the half of the countenance. Others, who had not yet attained to such venerable years, had adopted the more recent fashion of hats,



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and one could see more easily beneath their scantier margins the keen and piercing eyes with which they surveyed every person as he passed—scrutinizing with a dragon-like glance the quantum of his contribution to the heap of guarded copper before them."

Minor poetry has a good deal to say about these same Church dignitaries. The not very edifying Alexander Pennecuik in the mid-eighteenth century has verses on *The Stool of Repentance* and speaks of the Kirk Treasurer's man in his *Elegy on Robert Forbes*. Allan Ramsay, the most poetical of the predecessors of Burns, had also written about the Kirk Treasurer's man in his *Elegy on John Cupar*, and there is reference to Church Discipline in *O mither dear, I gin to fear*, where we read of "the stool" and "the pillar," and there is the revealing remark "for poor folk has na siller." Also in Ramsay's *An Address of Thanks* there is mention of "repenting stools," and the inquisitorial occupation of the Session. Robert Ferguson was another of the more outstanding writers at this period, and a verse in *The Farmer's Ingle* tells us something in this same connection :

"The couthy cracks begin whan supper's owre ;

'Bout kirk and market eke their tales gae on ;  
How Jock wooed Jenny here to be his bride ;  
And there, how Marion, for a bastard son,  
Upo' the cutty-stool was forced to ride,  
The waefu' scauld o' our mess John to bide."

Nineteenth century satirical verses on *The Kirk* by John F. Fergus describe the elders at the plate

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“puffed up wi’ pride o’ their estate,  
An’ watchin’ wi’ a cauld hard e’e,  
The dirlin’ penny or bawbee,  
But booin’ nearly to the grun’,  
When the auld laird staps in a pun.”

The writer goes on to characterise one of the elders—a dishonest grocer. The Rev. John Johnstone seeks also to expose the poor type of country elder, and gives an account of two meeting in the kirkyard before service, and doing some surreptitious bargaining, not without allusions to one or the other of them being drunk at market or after a Presbytery meeting. Walter C. Smith has sundry allusions to the Session from a friendlier point of view, and in *The Elder's Daughter* shows us the struggle between Truth and Mercy, between the stern disciplinarian and the loving father in a worthy elder. A higher tone is also to be found in J. C. Shairp's *Sacramental Sabbath*, where

“hoary-headed elders moving  
Bear the hallowed wine and bread.”

Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Lowden Sabbath Morn* and *The Scotsman's Return* both contain references to elders at the plate. There are a few allusions to the Session and its work of discipline in the *Bothy Songs and Ballads* collected by Ord. In Violet Jacob's *Songs of Angus* there is mention of the tyrannous elders who would lord it even over the minister. Charles Murray has one or two well-known touches with regard to elders. In the *Deil an' the Deevilock* it is on the programme to “help the elder pooch fae his ain kirk plate,”



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and *The Packman* was an elder with pride in his task for

“wi’ the ladle it was gran’  
To see him work the waster laft  
An’ never miss a man.”

‘Hugh Haliburton’ also has some lines on *The Absconding Elder*.

It is a little surprising to find so very few good anecdotes about elders. One or two appear in Dr. Gillespie’s *Humours of Scottish Life*, C. Rogers’s *A Century of Scottish Life*, Hislop’s *Book of Scottish Anecdotes*, Adamson’s *Religious Anecdotes*, and the well-known collection called *The Laird of Logan*, but there are many more stories about ministers and beadles than about elders. Even Ramsay’s famous *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* has nothing worth mentioning with regard to elders, and Dickson’s *The Kirk and its Worthies* has not much. Perhaps the best selection is in W. Harvey’s *Scottish Life and Character*.

Travellers to Scotland have occasionally made observations regarding the Eldership as they found it. One of the most interesting of these is the account given by Sir William Brereton, who visited the country in 1635 (the period of the First Episcopate). He refers to the work of elders and deacons, the latter attending to the poor, the former to discipline and to assisting the pastors “in the administration of the Sacrament,” being appointed annually by the people. His description of the stool of repentance is interesting: “A public and eminent seat, erected towards the lower end of the church about two yards from the ground,

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either about some pillar, or in some such conspicuous place, where the whole congregation may take notice of them ; this seat is capable of about six or eight persons." In an Edinburgh church he saw three women upon the stool of repentance and heard them rebuked. His impression was that the ecclesiastical censures were not harsh, but seriously meant towards reformation, and "very rarely, not once in many years, do they denounce any excommunicate." There is a reference to the church door collection, and to a regular assessment in addition towards the relief of the poor.

M. Martin, himself a Scot, published in 1703 a *Description of the Western Islands*, where he explains that "every parish in the Western Isles has a church judicature, called the Consistory or Kirksession, where the minister presides and a competent number of laymen, called elders, meet with him. They take cognisance of scandals, censure faulty persons, and with that strictness as to give an oath to those who are suspected of adultery or fornication ; for which they are to be proceeded against according to the custom of the country. They meet after divine service ; the chief heritor of the parish is present to concur with them and enforce their acts by his authority, which is irresistible within the bounds of his jurisdiction." This last point occurs also in the *Short Account of Scotland* by Thomas Morer, which dates from 1715, where in reference to an entirely different district he mentions the presence at Session meetings of a civil magistrate "to give 'em countenance, enforce their acts, and awe saucy offenders." Captain Burt's *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of*



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*Scotland* date from about 1730 and include some criticisms upon the methods and severity of ecclesiastical discipline. John Wesley in his *Journal* for 1759 is not very friendly to elders on the ground that they are always the richest men in the parish, an objection which may be contrasted with that of Sage half a century earlier that the Session consisted of "a precise ploughman," "a well affected webster," "a Covenanted cobbler," and such like mean persons. The *Travels in the Western Hebrides* of J. L. Buchanan was published in 1793, and is very severe as to the personal character of elders of the Church of Scotland in those regions. One would imagine from his account that the generality of them were thoroughly drunk and debauched, and he singles out for detailed narrative one particularly unhappy case by way of illustration. He says that elders do not attend Presbytery and Synod except for some very special reason, and his general estimate is that, "elders in the Hebrides are for the most part mere nominal officebearers as they take no concern about the spiritual state of the people, and in Kirk Courts vote or are silent just as their minister whose creatures they are." He does, however, admit that the quality of the elders in a parish depends a good deal upon the character of the minister, who has much authority in their selection.

The Rev. James Hall, whose *Travels* were published in 1807, makes many references to Church life. One elder appears "who was not only a religious but an honest and wellmeaning man" and whom we find occupied in trying to persuade certain people to go to church. Hall speaks of the

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care exercised by Sessions in keeping undesirable persons from the Lord's Supper, but is not certain that "private resentments" may not sometimes influence decisions. His judgment of the Seceders is unsympathetic. Their discipline he regards as particularly strict, but it is indicated that among them the rich escape censure more easily than the poor, this being explained by the fact that it is "scarcely possible for the poor ministers to be very severe towards the rich men of their flocks, on which chiefly they depend for their support." Hall gives an interesting account in one place of a Seceder Communion, and there is mention of "the little black gallery" for those under discipline.

Session Discipline has not been one of the features of Scottish life and character that have most appealed to foreigners. Few, however, have been more unfair in their criticism of it than Buckle, who has added to much else that is exaggerated and disproportioned in his account of the Scottish Church, this famous tirade :

"What further evidence need I bring to elucidate the real character of one of the most detestable tyrannies ever seen on the earth? When the Scotch kirk was at the height of its power, we may search history in vain for any institution which can compete with it except the Spanish Inquisition. Between these two, there is a close and intimate analogy. Both were intolerant, both were cruel, both made war upon the finest parts of human nature, and both destroyed every vestige of religious freedom."



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These representative references taken from so many types of Scottish literature and literature about Scotland seem to show all sides of the subject, and aid us to picture the many activities of the elder, and both the dangers and the possibilities of his office. It is clear that he held a position of commanding importance and serious responsibility in the community.

We must further note that many of the leaders of the national life were proud to be elders of the kirk. The eldership claims such a stalwart of the Reformation as Erskine of Dun, afterwards one of Knox's superintendents, and from that date most of the country's leaders. In the early Covenanting days both Montrose and Argyll were elders. Row describes "the honest Earl of Crawford" as "the great patron of the Presbyterians" and "a stout asserter of the Covenants." As prominent as any at this time was the zealot, Johnston of Warriston, one of the compilers of the National Covenant, clerk of the celebrated Glasgow Assembly, a representative of his Church to the Westminster Assembly and finally a martyr for Presbyterianism. The time-serving Lauderdale, who became one of the principal enemies of the Covenanters, was at one stage in his career a pious elder of the kirk. A little later we have a good example of the cultured elder, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, "a pretty good scholar and exceeding knowing in Divinity."

In the eighteenth century we find a remarkable array of lawyer politicians joining in the debates of the General Assemblies. Those must have been great times when men like the enigmatic Lord

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Grange ; the jovial Henry Dundas, Lord Melville, "for thirty years the most powerful man in Scotland" ; his high-flying opponent, the handsome, brilliant and witty Henry Erskine ; the father of Johnson's Boswell ; Sir Walter Scott's "Pleydell" ; and nearly everyone else of public consequence, served at one period or another as a representative elder. Even Lord Kames was an elder. At the beginning of the next century we have an elder, "citizen Maitland," eighth Earl of Lauderdale, taking a leading part in the famous Leslie dispute. Then there were such men as the Earl of Aberdeen, Campbell of Monzie and Sir George Sinclair, amongst those who were prominent in the efforts to avert Disruption. The chief hand in the composition of the *Claim of Right* was that of an elder, Alexander Murray Dunlop. One of the most stalwart upholders of the establishment was an elder, John Hope, afterwards Lord President.

In the late nineteenth century the several Presbyterian denominations were again blessed with enterprising lay leaders. Lord Overtoun had a place of his own in the Free Church. The United Presbyterian Church had such devoted friends as William McKerrow. Lord Balfour of Burleigh was a tower of strength to the Church of Scotland and a statesmanlike leader of the Church Union movement. Lord Sands succeeded him in this pious endeavour and helped to complete the work. It has always been much appreciated when one who is an active elder of the kirk has been appointed Lord High Commissioner, as in the case of the Earl of Stair, and Mr. James Brown, M.P.



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Many of the most saintly and the most serviceable elders must have been more or less unknown beyond their own immediate congregation ; but it is good for the Church and good for the country that there should also be upon our Sessions men of influence and rank, men known in public life, leaders in administration or in business, persons well acquainted with the world and the times, having practical experience that should assist to guide the Church into the ways of truest helpfulness in each generation. Clerical biographies—of which there have been many in the nineteenth century and since—are particularly cordial in their tribute to the eldership—to the kindness and sympathy and loyalty, to the restraining caution, to the inspiring encouragement, to the powerful example, and to the shrewd judgment of these representatives of the people.

## IX

### PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

THE Nineteenth Century clearly made a great alteration in the actual function of the Ruling Elder. There was no theoretical change. The Church did not discard or dream of discarding the Reformation teaching with regard to the Eldership, or decide that any one thing which elders had been in the habit of doing was no longer to have their attention. Yet as far as outward duties are concerned the twentieth century elder is only a shadow of his ancestor.

What a pity it is that as the elder was thus more or less relieved of particular activities other distinctive tasks were not set apart for him ! No doubt it was impracticable, and even now those who discuss the matter seem to concern themselves almost entirely with reviving rather than with attempting to reconstruct the office. The eldership has lost in significance, and is in need of modification and exaltation.

Discipline, for which the office was principally intended, and which constituted its chief and constant activity, has ceased to be anything more than a formal concern of the Session. The break-up of the Church of Scotland in the eighteenth century



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was the death blow to ecclesiastical authority. New ideas also with respect to personal liberty, Victorian delicacy regarding the discussion of sexual matters, a change of attitude to the whole question of punishment, a better understanding of the functions of government, the improvement of local and legal and police standards, the development of town and city life and the growth of a non-church-going population, all contributed to deprive the Session of its rights and powers in the matter of discipline.

The Session was no longer in a position to regulate the conduct of the parishioners, and laws that cannot be enforced and powers that cannot be exercised are to all intents and purposes non-existent. The situation is that excommunication has no terrors for anyone who is likely to be threatened with it ; suspension from Communion simply means adding to the number of regular non-churchgoers ; any interference with conduct merely drives individuals from one congregation to another ; and the Session has no means of influencing parishioners who are not communicants or would-be communicants. Within the congregation the elders have only the most formal say in the admission of new communicants. A certificate of nominal membership elsewhere, or attendance for a few weeks at a Young Communicants' Class is all that is generally required ; and once a communicant, always a communicant unless one flagrantly neglects the ordinance. No one of notoriously evil life would apply, and more subtle sinfulness is not investigated. Ministers and elders are frequently only too eager to encourage an accession of members, and too anxious not to offend those they have.

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Finance has come to bulk largely in the fact of membership, and people with a cash value, but not much value of any other sort, tend to be tolerated as they might not otherwise be. Some people seem to think that they have the same relation to their Church as they have to their doctor or butcher. Anything they may do or give is done or given as a favour to the minister and Session, and if it is not duly appreciated the "custom" will be taken elsewhere. I have myself been asked by a church member whether I had many "customers" in a certain street!

There are of course the very large numbers of the faithful whom this attitude horrifies, but these are negligible—and have throughout the centuries been negligible—from the point of view of discipline. If a case of moral lapse occurs and creates public scandal and those concerned are themselves willing to submit to discipline, the minister may by Grace help them wonderfully through his personal and private word. Many ministers are accustomed to having confessions made to them and being consulted as spiritual directors. Individual elders may have a similar experience. But cases do not normally come before the Session; the Discipline Book is very much of a farce; a casual and deliberately vague intimation is all that is expected or wanted.

In some respects the new conditions point to a higher stage of spiritual life than was common in earlier centuries. It corresponds to a reduction of the police force, or a transfer of police attention from crime to traffic. We are also rid of prudishness, not to say sadism. The standard and authority



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is now inward rather than merely legal. Those who belong to the Churches do so deliberately, and on the whole from Christian motives and with good intentions.

Yet there is also a certain helplessness betrayed by the situation, and the Church no longer seems to have its old courage, decision and independence. There remains, however, the inspiration of good example. The moral and spiritual influence of a Christian minister and a body of Christian elders in a congregation and a community will always be an irresistible authority.

The official care of the poor has become a matter for the State and the local government authorities. Here is another sphere in which Church enterprise has convinced the community and then been superseded. The situation in this regard is steadily improving, and anomalies and hard cases will no doubt be dealt with by what is at present a somewhat hard and fast system, hindered in its usefulness by red tape and a very understandable suspiciousness born of unfortunate experience. There is the loss of the old intimate knowledge of the individual cases which marked the days of Session control. On the other hand the problem has assumed new proportions, and only the nation seems to possess the resources to meet the situation even to the extent to which that is done to-day. The Church is, however, still concerned with the poor. There is room for voluntary agencies, especially to give expression to the Christian sentiment of brotherhood and charity and goodwill. There will never be an end of opportunities of showing the Christian spirit in an endeavour to help the unfortunate and

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the foolish. Hospitals, infirmaries and similar institutions also owe everything to Christian charity, although the Kirk Session no longer organises the collections, and although the Church receives less credit than it ought for the general success of the voluntary system of contribution still maintained in connection with these. The Church is not to be thought merely to be giving to such objects what it officially gives on the occasion of some special Church collections. Recently the Churches have been attempting something to meet the grave social difficulty of the unemployed. No one seems to be even on the way to solve this problem yet, but the Church is not behind in thinking about it. It also does directly and indirectly a great deal of organised Social Work.

Some congregations are troubled with the old superstition as regards giving which so encouraged the beggar in the mediæval Church and under Mohammedanism. It is not necessarily a religious act to give money when asked for it. Yet some Christians seem to find indiscriminate charity a simple way of quietening consciences that are proving themselves irritated—irritated either by failure to attack the problems properly, or by spiritual and moral defects, worldliness, non-attendance at Church, unchristian business ethics and such like. There are congregations also which have many attached to them very largely for the financial assistance that is forthcoming—sometimes from old mortifications which no longer serve a good purpose and ought to be diverted to other ends. This encourages subservience and fawning, greed and jealousy, parasitism. There is little to be



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said for the wholesale bribery associated with certain mission halls. Recent advances with respect to pensions, etc., have in some cases not been adequately appreciated by Kirk Sessions, and there is consequently much undesirable overlapping. Elders should see that they have some policy in the matter, and are not merely the slaves of custom, and aggravating rather than solving social problems.

It is generally agreed that a Kirk Session is not the body to control the general finance of congregations in days when this is such a complicated business matter. This is recognised by the latest Church of Scotland regulation, according to which such affairs are in the hands of an *ad hoc* Committee, which includes the elders, so that spiritual interests are fully represented, while the work may also have the attention of capable business men who would not care for the eldership. As in all other branches of modern society finance looms large in the church life of a congregation to-day. The old collection for the poor, when very little from each sufficed to meet all needs, is not now of the slightest use in view of the manifold obligations of the Church at home and abroad. As the expense of national and local government, education, poor relief and everything else has gone up, so the budget of the Church has naturally increased. Congregations of the United Presbyterian and Free Churches and *quoad sacra* congregations of the Church of Scotland were accustomed to subscribing liberally towards ministers' stipends, etc., and this has made it easier for them to grasp the situation ; but those in the old Church of Scotland parishes who were

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used to having religion provided for them almost free of cost (as had been necessary in feudal times and before wages took modern charges into consideration) have difficulty in realising that we have changed all that, and a slow process of awakening and education is begun. The privilege of Church membership now carries with it serious financial responsibility. This is one reason for the non-church-going of many who are not hostile to religion or to the Church, and would never dream of refusing Christian ordinances in connection with birth, marriage and death, yet who are not enthusiastic about it, and find their income all too small to meet the demands of the time in matters of taxes and housing, dress and amusement. There is, indeed, a great deal of thoughtlessness and ignorance behind poor giving ; and much will yet have to be done to explain the schemes of the Church and to convince the intelligent and well-meaning of the reality of the needs of the various Church Committees. No very satisfactory system has yet been devised, though there are indications of serious thinking on the subject.

A word must also be said upon another aspect of the case, which seems in danger of being overlooked. The National Church is concerned not simply with those who serve and give willingly, but with those who almost resent its existence and whom we yet dare not thrust aside from all connection with Christian ordinances. The Church must continue to say : " You may not want us ; you may not like us ; but here we stay in your midst, showing forth an ideal, preaching the Word, offering Christ. Our doors are open. The Gospel



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is free. We desire your salvation. We refuse our services to none. We do not debar you because you have not yet such a Christian spirit as to be eager to sacrifice for Christ. We will not let you go." This is a difficult question. It is not new. It is the problem of Church and Sect, Jesuit and Jansenist, and so on. All we need do at the moment is to recognise the two sides of the shield. This will be enough to prevent us hastily cutting off from the benefits of religion those whom it is our duty to draw rather closer into our Communion and the Communion of our Saviour.

There is not perhaps much left for the elder to do in the matter of education. The State has taken over this all-important service, and the Church has been left looking on admiringly, but somewhat anxiously, with vague rights of representation under the 1918 Act, and little actual influence even in the province of religious instruction. The chief worry is in connection with Secondary Schools. The elder can do little now but try to strengthen public opinion in favour of the best instruction possible in religion.

The elder retains his place of honour in connection with Communion. Probably there is something of deepened reverence in the actual conduct of Communion services to-day as compared with earlier times, and elders can contribute something to the orderliness and decency of things, even by such trifles as care in handling vessels, courtesy of manner in the distribution, noiselessness of movement, avoidance of fuss, and precision in following instructions. Even the custom of wearing a black coat and a white tie (though a

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survival) adds to the dignity and seemliness of the observance.

Elders do not concern themselves very seriously about the conditions of the admission of new communicants, but they may very well exercise themselves to make such members feel heartily welcome. Young communicants and members who have transferred to the congregation are often entertained socially by the elders, who may very appropriately be supported by their wives and by representatives of the various organisations which may hope to profit by the help of the newcomers. More might still be done in this direction, and pains taken to bring before all who are added to the roll the opportunities of service which membership of the congregation offers and the various claims they will be expected to recognise. There is work here for a Committee of the Session with an enthusiastic and enterprising Convener.

Organisations have just been mentioned. Here we come upon what is perhaps the greatest of the modern extensions of the Session's responsibilities. The development of congregational organisations in recent times has been nothing less than a revolution ; and the importance of this side of Church life in our time would seem to call for some adaptation of the Session to meet the new conditions produced. Organisations require very careful control and are by no means to be encouraged merely for their own sake. In connection with some congregations the suite of halls seems of more importance than the Church, and here we have perhaps a parallel to the tendency to diminish the importance of the home and increase the size of the



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garage, so that people are almost beginning to advertise for a garage with house attached. To have a certain organisation merely because others have it or because it will swell statistics or look well in the eyes of the public is very weak. And there is always the danger of organisations which in practice will merely provide amusement, so that the Kirk Session has reason to be watchful, and while encouraging what will attract to the Church and produce support for the spiritual work, at the same time to deal strictly with such as might injure the spiritual tone or become mere parasitic institutions.

Organisations as a whole have come to stay. They should be suitably housed in up-to-date halls, and so arranged that there is not much overlapping, but that there is something somewhere for everybody, old and young, intellectual and simple, men and women, rich and poor. The meetings may form a very useful stimulus to the friendly family feeling which is so fundamental to congregational success, may direct people to find their interests close to the Church, and may prevent many from wandering out of touch altogether. But the spiritual aim must be dominant, and it is the Session's business to attend to this.

It is important that the Session and the individual elders show practical and active interest in the various meetings. Elders may give an example, and can add power to this or that society or guild by leading personally or discovering workers, taking care that the energies of persons in their districts are finding an outlet in something connected with the Church. It is vital that activities should

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not be allowed to fall into the hands of a few, that in a family not merely one should be a Church worker, but that all who have gifts should have encouragement and indeed definite personal invitation to lend them to the congregation. Too large a proportion of our Church workers at present are over-employed at the expense of others. With a few, church meetings are a disease, and such usually do more harm than good to religion. Work should be widely shared ; and people should be trusted as far as possible, tried on a small task and promoted as may prove justifiable. Workers should begin young, and be trained at a stage when they will accept teaching, and before outside interests and friends have completely claimed them. Elders, especially with the help of their wives, could do much to increase the number of members actually employed about the affairs of the Church. A careful note of the younger members of the families in each elder's district is a necessity.

Sessions are often very appropriately divided into sub-committees according to the special interests of individual members, and thus different aspects of Church life may become a matter of deliberate consideration by a number of the leaders. The praise service and much else is thus dealt with in many congregations ; and we frequently find elders set aside as official visitors to one or other of the organisations, to give evidence of the Session's interest and to report upon what is being achieved and what is needed. An elder merely as such is of course not qualified to conduct a Bible Class or Sunday School. To be a leader of these admittedly now requires not merely aptitude and good will,



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but also special training. And the same may be true of other organisations. But amongst the elders, at least in more populous districts, there are sure to be some with the requisite experience, though elsewhere too much of this work falls to the minister.

One may remark that it is a pity that the visitation of districts by elders has become so superficial and formal, in many cases merely connected with the distribution of Communion cards or with special financial appeals. Formerly the elders knew their quarters intimately. Now they do not. Many would hesitate to make a call without a special reason. And besides, elders are busy at their work all day, and it is nowadays extremely difficult to find people at home in the evenings save by formal appointment. Perhaps on the whole too much has been asked of elders in this respect. They are given districts where the number of homes for which they are responsible is obviously far too large to be frequently covered, and this discourages them from doing anything. If elders were a good deal more numerous and the number of families that fell to each a good deal smaller there might be some chance of doing useful work by visiting. The personal touch is of the very utmost importance. It is necessary for interest, and interest is necessary for active membership. Visitation of the homes serves all the purposes of advertisement, and advertisement is absolutely necessary to-day. People need constant reminders as to Church things to prevent these being crowded out by the multiplicity of other interests that clamour for their attention.

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Fortunately some of the visiting is now otherwise attempted. Apart from the minister, there is sometimes an assistant, and he is generally very welcome in the homes, and may do something to stir up the zeal of those of his own age. Still more useful is the parish sister or similar lady assistant. The minister's wife has gracious functions of her own, and the wives of elders have likewise their responsibilities ; but in most congregations there is obvious room for a professional woman worker, of intelligence and training and culture and sense not inferior to that of an assistant minister and with corresponding pay. No useful purpose can possibly be served by a low standard with regard to such workers. There can be no doubt that for present requirements the paid staff in many congregations ought to be definitely larger than it is, and this need is not only due to the number of modern organisations in the Church and competing agencies outside, but in part to the fact that elders cannot now take the share they once did in the personal visitation of the members. They have not the necessary time. And the average elder is too shy a man to visit eagerly outside his own special circle, although if the initial backwardness were overcome he would probably enjoy the duty and do it well. Plenty of ministers have to force themselves to begin a round of visits who, once they are started, are perfectly happy and really useful. There will even be elders who have a gift which will enable them to pray with sick parishioners, and to speak words of more than formal comfort to the bereaved. Such men will be a strength to any congregation ; but one would not dream of restricting a Session



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to men of such capacity. It is well to emphasise the spiritual nature of the Eldership but there can be little doubt that most of this kind of service has to be performed now by clerical rather than lay assistants.

An improvement has shown itself in the matter of the age of elders. The tradition of the office—even its name—was apt to limit it to actual seniors, wise and saintly men of long experience. But with so many modern organisations about a church it is of the highest importance that the Session should be representative, and should have an understanding of the spiritual needs of all ages. It is likewise sensible to have in the Session men of different generations to keep the succession. The experience of the old, the energy of the middle-aged, the enthusiasm of the young are all needed. It is generally found useful to train men for the Session through other church activities, as deacons, Sunday School teachers, Boys' Brigade officers, choir members, and so on. There is sometimes felt to be a lack of outlet for men's interest in connection with church work and ministers cannot always find suitable employment for those whose gifts they wish to use; but a little more care might occasionally be taken in the distribution of activities. One man one job is a good rule for the ordinary member; and if a man is carefully assigned to work that he likes or carefully removed to work that he might like better, he can easily find scope within it for a great deal of effort. The job will grow with cultivation; and he may thus be prepared for the higher offices.

Ministers say that it is difficult to persuade men

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to become elders. The serious tradition of the office may have something to do with this. The right kind of man does not wish to be pretentious in his piety or to be suspected of posing as better than his fellows, or better than he is ; and modesty is always admirable. Harm may have been done to the office by the exceeding gloom of some of its representatives in the past. Harm may likewise have been done by the ready acceptance of office by men not widely esteemed for breadth of outlook or strength of intelligence or business capacity—nice men, but not weighty. And again there are now many attractive openings for service which appeal to men and which perhaps offer them more return than the eldership can do. Further, it is said that the very ablest men of our times do not find their way into public service, national, provincial or local, and this may have its ecclesiastical counterpart. Business to-day is a very exacting affair ; and the reaction is apt to be extreme, and not capable of being satisfied with the mild excitement of a Session meeting. And then many men of Christian upbringing and character are shy of mounting a platform where they might conceivably find themselves committed to hold extreme views on social questions, on war, on gambling, on drink or on Sunday observance. There are, besides, theological difficulties or difficulties imagined to be theological. Doubt exists in men's minds as to whether views which they meet almost universally in intelligent company with regard to the Bible, to Science, to History, are accepted by the Church, doubt encouraged by ministers' fears of offending in their preaching the susceptibilities of decent



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old-fashioned people, and by the continued thoughtless use in prayers and hymns and sermons of outworn expressions, and hesitation or inability to accept the responsibility of seriously educating in Bible Class or from pulpit. The typical elder in the past has been conservative—as, for example, the voting in the Robertson Smith case showed—and this conservatism is apt to be assumed to be part of the essential equipment of an elder. The favourite utterance of the eldership has sometimes been thought to be : “ We never did that before.”

One modern development of ecclesiastical organisation in Scotland might well call forth the interest and tempt the participation of laymen of the first rank. There are now Assembly Committees where there is plenty of work to do and where the most spiritual, the most practical, and the most far-seeing might find scope. And in the case of elders less outstanding, the Committees serve the important purpose of imparting knowledge and stirring up interest. There are also Presbytery Committees, which may have a like influence and provide a like opportunity on a smaller scale. Elders still form an important element in the Courts of the Church—sometimes a very permanent element (there are not many ministers who, like an Aberdeen elder only recently deceased, have been continuously elected to the Assembly for forty years) ; but sometimes a very changing element (many are only at one Assembly in a lifetime). Elders speak little at open meetings of Presbytery and Assembly ; but, in spite of the flow of clerical oratory, they find a better place at Committee meetings. It is of real consequence to strengthen this side of the

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Elder's function, and to keep up the tradition of having the Church from its headquarters, national and provincial and local, guided by combined ministerial and lay wisdom. Perhaps the several Church committees may some day have a correspondent in every Kirk Session.

One welcomes very specially the modern Elders' Unions. All elders should be in those Unions. In becoming an elder one should automatically become a member of a recognised body consisting of all the elders of the Church. It would be good if the Unions could develop into a position of some authority, such as elders have worked out for themselves in Hungary. There is much that elders could profitably do without falling into the rut of merely hearing addresses from ministers—surely a last resort. Some questions might with advantage to the Church be practically delegated to them, perhaps in association with deacons and those similarly engaged, particularly questions such as those of the Maintenance of the Ministry, about which no minister ought to have to think, let alone speak. And in Presbyteries, it occurs to me that matters regarding removal of members from one parish to another might be better managed than they are at present if the Eldership took them over. Again the elders in the Gereformeerde Kerk of Holland have a monthly magazine of their own, and hold occasional conferences on a large scale—indications surely that there is yet room for advance amongst ourselves.

One line of development which changed modern conditions seem to suggest is the opening of the eldership to women. This would be something of



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a revolution, but simply in line with revolutions in the worlds of medicine, politics, local government, scholarship, journalism, law, industry and traffic. Practically considered it seems clear that there is none of the duties of an elder which a woman is not capable of performing as well as these are ordinarily performed ; and there are some with regard to which women have peculiar qualifications, and which might be better managed with their direct help. Already elders' wives do at least as much visiting as their husbands. There is the praise service also : more women than men have knowledge of and are interested in music. The Session has the supervision of Sunday Schools and other work amongst children : these are departments where the advice of women might be invited. Even in matters of discipline women would be a strength. Discipline cases scarcely ever come before a Session now, but, if they did, a mixed jury would certainly be more fair and sensible than one consisting entirely of males. In this respect the Church need not lag behind civil law. In private dealing with delicate cases women elders might be the salvation of the situation. It would be a gain if women in moral and spiritual difficulties could have the possibility of consulting persons of their own sex who had the authority of an official Church imprimatur. All women would not have the necessary tact and sympathy and commonsense, but neither have all men. At present there must be much unnecessary repression, avoidable domestic calamity, and exaggerated moral crisis. The more we are impressed by the difference between the gifts and outlook of women and those of men, the more we

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should feel how important it is that both should contribute to the regulation of a congregation which consists of both men and women, and to the care of its spiritual interests. It seems folly to scorn or slight the contribution which women might offer.

By not claiming the assistance of women in such matters as Session work, the Church drives them to put their zeal and ability to other uses outside. It is of moment to retain within and for the Church all the powers and graces available. In the sphere of the spiritual, women have special gifts. Their interest in worship is more obvious than that of men. And it is the women with the highest spiritual capacities who sometimes fail to find suitable self-expression inside the Church to-day, and have to seek outlets in social work and other activities only indirectly religious. A more distinctive place should be made for such people within the Church, and it seems meaningless to debar them from a Kirk Session and from other ecclesiastical courts.

Nor is there anything in principle to prevent their admission. Those whose conception of the ministry tends Romewards regard elders as "mere" laymen, not ordained in any true sense; and they have no theoretical objection to women being admitted to an office which is not clerical. Those who rate ministers and elders together as constituting a special spiritual caste, if they refuse on principle to accept women for such positions do so from what can only be some pre-Christian notion of female uncleanness in relation to holy things, a reason which belongs to the province of taboo



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or magic, a totally unjustifiable obtrusion of sex considerations. Those who accept the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers cannot consistently debar women from any office to which these may aspire and to which these may be called.

Further, no valid objection can be deduced from Scripture. Social conditions in the days of the Apostles did not permit women to occupy the public positions now open to them, and it would have been unthinkable to have had women in the priesthood, and no one ever dreamt of raising the question as to whether they might theoretically have this or that office in the Church. The problem had not been set. Various utterances of St. Paul which have been directed against women's activities in connection with religion clearly belong not to the realm of the spiritual but to that of the social. They involve such considerations as convenience and advisability, but do not touch upon the question of principle. And underlying all that Paul said is his Christianity. His principles are plain. And one of the plainest of them is spiritual equality. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free.

The only serious difficulties are practical, and it is for the faith and commonsense of the Christian community to decide whether these are not outweighed by the practical advantages already suggested. Time and goodwill have accustomed congregations to many changes in the last century or two. There would soon appear nothing distracting in having women taking collections or sitting about a Communion table, any more than there now is in having an organ or singing hymns

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or having choir girls sitting in a prominent position beneath the pulpit. If it is "unseemly" to have women distributing the elements at Communion, it would logically be unseemly to have them passing bread and wine to their neighbours in the mixed congregation, and they should simply be excluded from the privilege of Communion altogether—as they are excluded from Mohammedan mosques. Men and women still sit apart in Holland, in the Syriac Church, and in modern African missions. At one time they did so in Scotland also ; but the advisability of this amongst us has now disappeared, and the discrimination in the administering of the Communion might well follow.

It is indeed difficult to persuade men to be elders to-day, and some suggest it might become more difficult if there were women in the Session. The effect, however, might turn out to be just the opposite. Men are sometimes shy of the office on account of its seventeenth century characteristics and reputation. They don't want to be like that. But a mixed executive of the spiritual community would have nothing about it to repel them. There would nowhere—at least for a very long time to come—be more than one or two women on any Session. Church courts would not be swamped by women. No congregation would be obliged to have a single woman elder. Men would still be required in as great numbers as formerly. The difficulty of providing useful occupation for men in connection with a congregation is often felt and has been already mentioned ; but it cannot be faced simply by keeping one committee for which men alone are arbitrarily declared eligible. The



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cure is rather to be sought in more enterprise and attention to the point. If boys are interested young enough and never allowed to get out of touch there is little difficulty in making them happy in their Church connection and so finding oneself with plenty of male workers.

Women members might indeed disturb the peace of some Sessions by new ideas or novel suggestions. One can see nothing but good in this possibility. Some ministers rejoice in the want of initiative in their elders : others deplore it : few would deny it ; the Church would be greatly benefited by a little more stir in many a Session. And responsibility such as is involved in eldership might have a very educative influence upon women and counteract certain tendencies of women's committees which men at present criticise.

Some difficulty is created by the organisation of Women's Committees parallel to the regular Assembly Committees in connection with Foreign and other Missions and Schemes. But it should be noticed that the policy of the Church in this has been dictated not by logic but by commercial instinct. Finance and finance alone seems to justify these partial duplications, which have resulted in a natural demand for representation. If there were women elders these and these alone would presumably be entitled to membership of Church courts and committees. Such is the rule in the case of men. Or else new anomalies would appear. Certainly the present representatives who have gradually been acquiring such rights as speaking at Assemblies would not all normally become elders, and women elders would not be elected specially to represent women any more than men

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are now elected to represent men ; and in any case they might never reach such numbers as to be regarded as a reasonable representation. Apart altogether from the eldership question, the present system is bad. It is neither one thing nor another. As far as Assembly is concerned it only gives a shadow of representation at the best. The membership of the Committees shows curious anomalies. The whole situation requires to be looked into carefully. It should not be impossible to mend matters and to devise an accommodation scheme which would not rule out women elders.

Most women at present have probably no desire to be elders. The very name is unattractive to them. But this is no reason for maintaining an absolute law against their possible admission. Even if none will accept office it ought in justice to be open to them, and the Church should express its readiness to use their services. Women elders exist. The Presbyterian Church of England, for example, has found it practicable to remove the barrier to their election. And the Church has always claimed to have the guidance of the Holy Spirit in alterations that have actually taken place, and to be conscious that her Lord has many things yet to say to her. Mere tradition is not our final test. These are difficult days for the Church, and all the strength and character available should be at her free disposal.

Whatever modifications in the precise functions of elders may have taken place or may be proposed, not much change can be suggested in the qualifications for the eldership. The requirements of the *First Book of Discipline* still hold : " Men of best knowledge in God's word and cleanest life,



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most faithful and of most honest conversation that can be found in the kirk."

Those who are chosen for such office should be of Christian character. That implies some strength and colour of personality as well as a humble spirit of consecration and moral endeavour and an appreciation of things spiritual. It means also the complete absence of sanctimoniousness and fussy piety, of hypocrisy, cant, and self-righteousness, of hard, illiberal, narrow outlook, of inhumanity and lack of humour. The weak and soft, the self-admiring talker, the amateur theologian, the self-centred and touchy and quarrelsome are not wanted in the Session. But there is room for simple faith and devoted single talents. There is room also for strong leaders, men of principle, men of initiative and imagination, men of tried efficiency. Some will be more or less specialists in Church work, but others are needed also who take an outstanding place in public life—which will be good for public life and also for the congregation. We need the conservative and the radical, the old and the young, the intellectual and the spiritual, those who walk and those who run and those who mount up with wings as eagles.

A high standard is expected of elders. The General Assembly in 1579 forbade people to take part in certain light practices, *especially* elders and deacons, thus showing that more was required from those in office than from others. And elders have generally recognised that they must follow the precept of Erasmus, who urged that what in others is but a small trespass, we should regard as in ourselves a great outrage or excess.

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The elder will attend church assiduously and otherwise quietly set an example to his fellow members. He ought to be a religious man and to know his Bible. He should be a suitable trustee of lay ideas and interests. He will naturally be able in many ways—by a word or without opening his mouth—to impart strength or encouragement or comfort or self-knowledge. James Melville tells us how when he was a boy of twelve in 1570 a few words were spoken to him by “a guid honest man an elder of the kirk” and had remained with him ever since ; and the succeeding centuries have not lessened the value of this kind of work, nor reduced the occasions for it, though it does not appear perhaps among the scheduled functions of the elder.

Elders have not always been all that they might have been. The Assembly of 1562 complains that sometimes “gentlemen of vitious lives” were being chosen elders, and Wodrow found himself faced by the same assertion in 1715. Probably it has not often been so ; but there have frequently been insignificant and uninspiring elders. Dr. Robert Lee in the middle of the nineteenth century suggested that ministers sometimes selected “nobodies” for their Session in order to have everything their own way, while Dean Stanley was quick to notice that the kind of laymen who took a great interest in Church affairs were often not representative of the true lay mind of the country, and were sometimes almost “clergymen under another form rather than the real laity themselves.”

But the Eldership has justified itself in history. It has adaptability which should make it capable of serving each generation as that generation



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needs to be served. It has the permanent function of keeping the Church and the world in proper contact. It prevents the clergy from thinking themselves the Church or acting as the Church, and thus it protects us against a return of the Middle Ages. It brings in commonsense to check professionalism, and keeps ecclesiastical thinking and organisation in touch with the every-day life of the ordinary church member and in touch also with the general life of the community. It is a stout bulwark for the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It is a constant reminder to all Christians that the advance of the Kingdom and of God's glory is their personal concern, that this privilege and responsibility is not confined to ministers, but that all are called to serve. It does interest the people in the Church. It does provide the possibility of very efficient congregational organisation. And it is a steady witness to the brotherhood of Christians, for the nobleman and his servant may be ordained side by side, and the Session brings together on a common platform all classes of society. It is a great institution, worth preserving, worth promoting, worth improving. The Church of Scotland, like other Presbyterian Churches, is extremely fortunate in being able to offer laymen such a part to play, and the work is such as any sincere and consecrated Christian may well be proud to have entrusted to him. "The employment is not theirs," says James Guthrie, "but the Lord's, from whom they may expect both their furniture and also their reward. Let them arise and be doing, and the Lord shall be with them."

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